# Alexei Kondratiev's Lorekeepers
# Course 1.0

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*- littlegaydruid*

# The Lore Keeper Course

As an official of the now inactive organization IMBAS, the late Celtic scholar Alexei Kondratiev oversaw the development of a training course geared toward the purpose of developing a Celtic worldview in its predominantly Anglo-American membership. As his original material was non-denominational, Kondratiev, with the help of several volunteers, adapted the material incorporated in his Celtic history and mythology classes into a program called "The Lorekeepers Course" directed specifically towards IMBAS' predominantly Celtic Reconstructionism (CR) audience.

After the completion of the basic outline of the course, work on the training of mentors and implementation of the course came to a standstill. The final goal had been to complete a test run of the course with Kondratiev as a mentor to work out the bugs and implement new material as deemed necessary. With the dissolution of IMBAS as a corporate entity in 2004, failed attempts by its officers to re-start the non-profit entity, and the subsequent resignation of its last president, the course was shelved without final development.

Over the rest of the decade, numerous attempts to revive the Lorekeepers course or persuade Kondratiev to present it outside of IMBAS were unsuccessful until April 2010, when he agreed to allow Tearlach Roibeard Luder to resurrect the course and offer it on Celtic Nation to the general public. Luder agreed to compile the material, develop the web presence for the course and to host it on the Celtic Nation servers; Kondratiev agreed to mentor the course once on-line until a competent group of mentors was in place to take over the teaching duties.

One of the decided directions of the new efforts by the two was to direct the course back towards its original non-denominational presentation. With that in mind, new material was to be added and allowances were to be made for the continued upgrade of the course as time progressed.

Sadly, Alexei passed away unexpectedly at the end of May 2010, without witnessing the completion of the course's implementation. Despite all of the material that had been received over the previous thirty days, a final outline incorporating the new with the old was incomplete. As the untested version had never been officially published, there was considerable doubt as how best to proceed.

In June 2010, Luder and fellow members of the Celtic Nation Yahoo Group made appeals to former members of original volunteers for help in recovering any of the pieces of the course outline to compare to the new material. Graciously, Dubh Tine, a longtime member of the IMBAS council in its heyday, volunteered his time and efforts to discover and forward a significant portion of the languishing course outline. His efforts were instrumental in formatting the new outline and all those who enjoy the course going forward owe him a debt of gratitude. Pech Raithbheartiagh, also a former volunteer on the original project, recovered several important pieces from an old hard drive to help round out the outline. Cuardai Eolais provided continuing compilation assistance as well. With their invaluable help and generosity, Luder was able to begin matching the sections of the original course outline to the new work started just prior to Kondratiev's death. As time progresses, additional material of Alexei's will be made available and noted as it is added. For referencing purposes, this is "Alexei Kondratiev's Lorekeepers Course 1.0".

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### *What is "Celtic Studies"?*

*Celtic Studies is a broad field that has as its core the languages, literatures, and histories of Celtic-speaking peoples, from the Continental Celts of ancient Gaul to the modern survivals in Scotland, Ireland, the island of Man, Wales, Cornwall, and Brittany. The discipline of Celtic Studies extends into a wide range of topics, including archaeology, art, music, literature, folklore, religion, dance, immigration, and ethnic studies.*

*It is our hope through the publishing of this course that we can help others in their comprehension, enjoyment, analysis, and critical evaluation of different kinds of texts in regards to what is "Celtic" and how to broaden your research skills, using both electronic and traditional media and emphasizing the evaluation of argument and literary evidence.*

*"Questioning is the door of knowledge." –Irish Proverb*

# Track One: History

# Who are the Celts?

Celt: One who lives in a community where a Celtic language is used traditionally, or one who has strong ties to such a community.

Celtic: Anything relating to the identity and traditions of such communities.

Who are the Celts? This, it turns out, is a surprisingly difficult question to answer – mostly because the term "Celt" has acquired a variety of meanings today, not all of them compatible; and some of them are either too vague to be useful or are based on incorrect assumptions. This doesn't mean that there isn't, in fact, a perfectly objective and useful definition of the word "Celt', but we will first have to unravel it from the many other meanings people have given to the word over time.

The word "Celt" first appeared in Greek writing of the 6th century BCE, when the Greeks were establishing many new settlements in the western half of the Mediterranean and opening trade contacts with the people who lived to the north of that area. They originally made a distinction between the people they called *Keltoi* and those they called *Galatai*, but later considered the two terms to be synonymous. The Romans picked up the former term and Latinized it as *Celtae*, but they more often spoke of the people as *Galli*, or "Gauls". During the Middle Ages and Renaissance the term "Celtic" was still used occasionally in a geographic sense, denoting people or things from Western Europe in general and from France in particular (one should note that "Celtic" was never used to refer to Ireland or Scotland – the countries most often thought to be "Celtic" today).

Then, around the year 1700, Edward Lhuyd, a Welsh scholar working in Oxford, discovered that the language spoken by the people who had been called Celts in Classical antiquity (as far as one could tell from personal and place names) was closely related to his own native Welsh language. He also found that five other modern languages – Irish, Scots Gaelic, Breton, Cornish and Manx – shared in this relationship. He decided to use the term "Celtic" to describe this particular group of languages, both ancient and modern. This is the definition of "Celtic" that all Celtic scholars use to this day: a specific family of languages, the communities that have spoken them through history, and the cultural traditions that have been passed down through the medium of those languages.

However, several political and cultural developments during the nineteenth century

obscured this original definition. The rise of nationalism led to a search for "national" characteristics that were innate in a people and had always tied them to a particular territory. This in turn led to a fascination with the notion of "race" as an explanation for the way such characteristics were inherited. The rise of colonialism, which sought to justify itself with the argument that colonized peoples were naturally "inferior" and in need of guidance, seized on racialism (the belief that people who share certain physical traits like skin or hair color also share the same moral and intellectual traits) as a "scientific" basis for such policies. Racialism and nationalism became a part of popular culture, often leading to an inappropriate perception of linguistic and cultural categories as racial categories.

Thus the six Celtic nations, which had been called "Celtic" because of the language which served as the basis for their national culture, were now thought to have distinguishing characteristics on the mistaken premise that they were composed of racially separate people called "Celts". This is why so many people today think of themselves as "Celts by blood". Tracing their ancestry back to one of the six Celtic countries gives them a self-sufficient Celtic identity, which they assume includes a genetically inherited personality type. In reality, of course, there's no such thing as a Celtic "race", or a distinct genetic profile that could be called "Celtic". Celtic language and culture were adopted (and abandoned) by many, genetically diverse communities across Europe at various times: their Celtic identity wasn't based on anything they had inherited physically.

Another definition of "Celtic" – which developed out of the racial definition – is the "spiritual" one: that "Celtic" refers to a "philosophy", a "view of life", which need not be tied to the traditions of any specific language-community. This "philosophy" often relates to stereotypes created by the dominant culture, which are usually included among the racial characteristics attributed to the Celts: that they're dreamy, imaginative, mystical, creative, impractical, undisciplined (because of their great love of freedom), etc. This is really a matter of the dominant culture adopting a Romantic view of a minority culture and projecting its own hopes and desires onto it. The Celts are then seen as a counterculture within the dominant culture rather than as an autonomous cultural tradition in their own right. But this kind of "spiritual" definition is hard to apply to Celtic reality. People in Celtic-speaking communities display the full range of personality types one finds in any culture, from "dreamers" to hard-headed pragmatists. The traits that define their "Celtic-ness" are to be found at a much deeper level than any easily defined "philosophy" and have to do with the

cultural consciousness that is sustained by the languages they speak.

The only "hard" definition we're left with, then, is the original linguistic one. Celtic communities are communities where Celtic languages are spoken. Celtic culture is what is passed down within those communities. Celts are people who are members of such communities or have close ties to them. Tracing one's ancestry to a Celtic community may give one a very powerful motivation to identify with and learn about Celtic culture, but it will not provide one with an automatic understanding of that culture. The Celtic languages are the medium of Celtic tradition, and the key that gives access to all the other elements that make up the culture.

This should not be taken to mean that all Celtic-language communities share the same culture. These communities have, through the course of history, adapted to a wide range of circumstances, and each one has developed customs and institutions unique to itself. The use of "Celt" as a blanket term for them is, as we have seen, a modern innovation: none of these communities would, before the nineteenth century, have ever called themselves by that name. During Antiquity and the Middle Ages they would have identified with the tribal units they belonged to – even a term like "Irish", when applied to the early mediaeval period, is a projection of a modern concept onto the past, since most people in Ireland would have had no concept of allegiance to a nation embracing the whole island, but only to their local tribal kingdoms. However, this does not mean that applying modern categories of this kind to the interpretation of historical events in the remote past is necessarily illegitimate or without value.

The term "Celtic", as we have defined it, has real, objective content: the languages do have a common origin, the communities that speak them do have continuous identities going back to Antiquity and, because of geographical proximity and many shared institutions inherited from their common past, have tended to undergo similar experiences during the last two millennia of European history. By using "Celtic" as an overarching term to designate these peoples we choose to emphasize what they have in common rather than what sets them apart. In the historical sketch that follows, we will refer to "Celts" when discussing events or circumstances that affected all or most Celtic-language communities at a given time, and we will use names of specific communities when we mention local events that affected only them.

Celtic languages and cultures are themselves descended from an older Indo-European

tradition, which is ancestral to most of the linguistic and cultural traditions of Europe, Iran and India. There still isn't complete agreement among scholars about where and when the original Indo-Europeans lived, but most of the evidence points to the area between the Black and Caspian Seas between 5000 and 4000 BCE. Their economy was based primarily on herding, and their society was dominated by a horse-riding warrior class (whence the importance of the horse in their culture as a symbol of sovereignty and leadership). Among the important features of their belief system that we can reconstruct are: a tri-functional model of society, with a hierarchy of complementary castes (a religious/juridical caste, a warrior caste, and a merchant/farmer caste), each with its own internal rules of conduct; two pantheons of deities in conflict, one associated with the sky-realm, order and culture, the other with the watery Underworld, chaos and fertility; and nurturing goddesses linked to specific territories, often associated with rivers. All these elements remained a part of the Celtic heritage when the Celts first began to differentiate themselves from other Indo-Europeans as a distinct ethnic group, probably around 1200 BCE.

Irish, Scots Gaelic and Manx are referred to as Goidelic or "Q-Celtic" languages, while Welsh, Cornish and Breton are the Brythonic or "P-Celtic" languages. The terms "Q-Celtic" and "P-Celtic" are a reflection of the fact that the original sound 'kw' of Old Celtic turned into a 'c' in Goidelic languages but became a 'p' in Brythonic languages. The word for "head", to give an example, is *ceann* in Irish and *pen* in Welsh.]

# The Origin of the Celts – Late Bronze Age (ca.1100-800 BCE - "Urnfields")

The Indo-Europeans appear to have entered Europe in several different movements, but one culture that came to dominate central and eastern Europe after 3000 BCE is almost certainly the one from which the main Indo-European groups known in later European history eventually sprang. This is sometimes called the Battle-Axe Culture (from the weapons found in its gravesites) as well as the Corded Ware Culture (from its distinctive style of pottery). In the course of the Bronze Age this culture began to split up into separate regional cultures. One of these developed in central Europe, in an area roughly coinciding with southern Germany. It is now clear that this marks the first appearance of the Celts as a distinct ethnic entity. This is when their language (which we call Old Celtic) differentiated itself from related Indo-European dialects, creating a new linguistic and cultural community.

As far as one can tell from the archaeological record, these early Celts remained typical Indo-Europeans. They gave a great importance to their warriors and revered the horse, along with other symbols that later Celtic tradition would associate with the sacred king – the political leader who also fulfills a religious duty by linking his people with the goddess of the Land. At this time they abandoned their original funerary practices (burial under raised mounds of earth) and adopted cremation, placing the ashes of their dead in urns that were buried together in cemeteries. Because of this characteristic feature archaeologists usually refer to this period of Celtic prehistory as the "Urnfield Culture".

Around the 12th century BCE major political upheavals among the urban cultures of the Mediterranean completely upset the traditional patterns of travel and trade in the Western world. Although most of the trade was between the Mediterranean peoples themselves, there was always a demand for products of northern Europe – amber, furs, slaves, wild animals – and especially for some necessary ingredients of Bronze Age technology – such as tin – which were hard to come by except on the Atlantic seaboard. The Celts quickly took the opportunity to control most of the north-south trade in Europe. They established trading settlements west across what would eventually become Gaul, seeking to establish reliable trade routes to the metal-rich areas along the coast of the Atlantic. Those areas had long been inhabited by a distinctive and powerful (and probably non-Indo-European) "Atlantic"

culture, which has left us impressive monuments like Newgrange, Avebury, Carnac, etc. (and, somewhat later, the most famous one of them all, Stonehenge). This culture occupied the Armorican peninsula (present-day Brittany), Ireland, and Britain with all its islands north to Orkney and Shetland. Through trade alliances, partial colonization, and intermarriage the Celts managed to implant their language and cultural identity in this region, probably around 900 BCE. The form of Celtic that evolved in the "Atlantic" area was almost certainly Goidelic (the ancestor of the modern Gaelic languages), but over the next thousand years other forms of Celtic came to predominate in much of the region, with Goidelic surviving only in Ireland.

It was also in the Late Bronze Age that the Celts began to settle in Spain. The language that evolved in their community, Celtiberian, was written in the curious system (part-alphabet, part-syllabary) used by their neighbors, the non-Indo-European Iberians. Around the same time, Celtic colonies were established in northernmost Italy, just south of the Alps. Their language became Lepontic, which was written in an alphabet they borrowed from the Etruscans. These Lepontic-speaking Celts (whom archaeologists refer to as the "Golasecca culture") became an important trade link between the Celtic heartland in central Europe and the Mediterranean markets further south.

Important archaeological sites:

Riegsee (southern Germany)

Innsbrück/Wilten (Austria)

Notable artifacts:

Votive chariot from Acholshausen (Germany) Votive chariot from Bujornu (Romania)

Fibula with hangings from Medvedze (Hungary)

Suggested basic reading:

Cunliffe "The Ancient Celts" pp. 39-44

QUESTIONS

1. Using evidence from several archaeological sites, describe the basic characteristics of an Urnfield cemetery.
2. What does the continuation of inhumation practices side by side with cremation

suggest?

3. Using evidence from several archaeological sites, describe a typical settlement from the Urnsfield period.
4. Comment on any notable themes or patterns that appear in the artifacts of the period.

# The Early Iron Age (800-450 BCE - "Halstatt")

Around 800 BCE a new group of Indo-European peoples began to enter eastern Europe from the ancient Indo-European heartland of the Pontic-Caspian steppe. Greeks called them the Cimmerians, and (a few centuries later) the Thracians. Like their ancestors, they were herdsmen with a "horse culture": a need for swift mobility across wide open spaces had led them to place a strong emphasis on the care and training of horses. The Celts of the upper Danube entered into alliances with these peoples and absorbed their cavalry techniques. At about the same time iron technology reached them, also from the east. Armed with iron weapons and a sophisticated cavalry, the Celts from the area between the Rhine and the Danube enjoyed an overwhelming military superiority over the people s to the west of them and easily established their control over the important trade routes between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. A new aristocracy began to rule central and western Europe, building impressive forts on hilltops from which they imposed their power on scattered herding and farming communities.

In the year 600 BCE the Phocaean Greeks, always on the lookout for new markets in the western Mediterranean, founded the city of Massalia (present-day Marseille) on the coast of southern Gaul, near the mouth of the Rhine. This provided a wonderful opportunity for the Celtic merchant-princes: the Rhine and its tributary rivers afforded easy passage from the Mediterranean into the Celtic heartland. The fruitful trade that developed as a result of this made them immensely rich and allowed them to live in a style of dazzling opulence. Princely lineages confirmed their political power by lavishing gifts on their vassals and retainers at feasts where prestige items obtained through Mediterranean trade were ostentatiously displayed. A vivid glimpse of this world of wealth and glamour can be obtained through the princely graves dating from this period, when cremation was being gradually abandoned in

favor of (for aristocrats, at least) burial in a chamber under a tumulus, surrounded by items that had belonged to the deceased in life. The objects found in the graves illustrate the beauty and brilliance the Celtic merchant-princes cultivated in their daily lives, as well as their ability to obtain goods from as far away as China. It may well be that descriptions of the splendor of royal courts in later Celtic literature reflect a distant memory of this colorful era.

Archaeologists refer to this period in Celtic development as "Halstatt", after an Austrian site that built its wealth on the production of rock salt – another important item in European trade.

Some important archaeological sites:

Halstatt (Austria)
Dürrnberg (Austria)
Hochdorf (Germany)
Heuneburg (Germany)
Hohmichele (Germany)
Asperg (Germany)
Magdalenenberg (Germany)
Ditzingen-Hirschlanden (Germany)
Burgenrain (Switzerland)
Wittnauer Horn (Switzerland)
Mont-Lassois (France)
Vix (France)
La Garenne/Sainte-Colombe (France)
Châtillon-sur-Glâne(France)
Bragny sur Saône (France)
Les Jogasses (France)
Golasecca (Italy)
Ca' Morta/Como (Italy)
Zavist (Czech Republic)
Manetin-Hradek (Czech Republic)
Blatnica (Slovakia)
Süttš (Hungary)

Some notable artifacts:

Burial chariot from Hochdorf (Germany)

Burial couch from Hochdorf (Germany)

Giant Greek-made wine krater from Vix (France) Gold torc from Vix (France)

Spiral-ended armlet from Süttš (Hungary) Tomb effigy from Ditzingen-Hirschlanden (Germany)

Some suggested basic reading:

Cunliffe "The Ancient Celts" pp. 44-67; James "The World of the Celts" pp. 19-28; Rizzoli "The Celts" pp. 72-123.

QUESTIONS

1. Describe and discuss the significance of each of the following sites:
    a) Hochdorf
    b) Heuneburg
    c) Vix
    d) Zavist
2. From the archaeological evidence, what was the nature of the relationship between the Celtic world and the Mediterranean world in the Early Iron Age? What items did they trade?
3. What does the archaeological evidence tell us about the structure of Early Iron Age Celtic society?
4. Discuss patterns and motifs in the artifacts of the period. Do any of these seem to be carried over from the previous (Late Bronze Age) period?

# The Later Iron Age (450 BCE-ca. 80 CE - "La Tène")

Around 450 BCE a major upheaval took place in the Celtic heartland. The main centers of princely power were violently destroyed. Since the Celts left no written records from this time we can't know for certain what happened, but it seems likely that the old, established aristocratic lineages were overthrown by other lineages who wanted access to the same

profitable trade-routes. The centre of political and economic power in the Celtic world shifted a little to the north and west, to the area between the Marne and the Moselle (there was a secondary centre in Bohemia to the east).

In a way, the Celts had been destabilized by their very success. Increased availability of resources had led to a serious overpopulation of the Celtic heartland, forcing large numbers of people to seek homes beyond traditional Celtic borders. Sometimes entire tribal groups would migrate in this fashion. A prestigious and wealthy chieftain would surround himself with clients (*ambacti*) who swore fealty to him and accompanied him on his military expeditions in exchange for glory and plunder. In some cases they would settle down in a new territory; in others, they would remain landless mercenaries, serving the political interests of non-Celtic Mediterranean peoples. The latter situation may represent the origin of what mediaeval Irish literature calls *fianas*: unsettled warrior-fraternities surviving by hunting, plunder and mercenary engagements, independent of most of the institutions of mainstream Celtic society.

All these population movements resulted in a huge territorial expansion of the Celtic world. A combination of groups from the Rhineland and Bohemia took over virtually all of Italy north of Tuscany, so that the region came to be called Cisalpine Gaul. In 390 BCE they entered into conflicts with the Romans, and even succeeded in sacking the city of Rome – an outrage the Romans never forgot. New arrivals from Gaul settled in northern Spain. To the east, groups hiving off from the Bohemian homeland established settlements in the Balkans, all the way across the Danubian plain to the Black Sea coast, and even beyond that to what is now Ukraine, while their northernmost advance led them to what is now southern Poland. One such group raided Greece in the early 3rd century BCE, and then alternately cooperated with or threatened the local communities until King Nicomedes of Bithynia gave them a territory in Asia Minor where they could settle permanently: this became Galatia, the area of Anatolia around present-day Ankara. Celtic mercenaries played a conspicuous role in many conflicts of the region: some even became auxiliaries of the Ptolemies in Egypt.

Despite the volatile political atmosphere, this was a period of increased self-confidence, cultural enrichment and creativity for the Celts. Celtic artists came under the influence of many different models from different cultures, yet they synthesized all these influences into a unique, instantly recognizable style of their own – a vocabulary of fluid geometric forms we have come to see as fundamental to the tradition of "Celtic art". From the new wealth of

symbolic motifs in this art (some of it traceable to Eastern models), one can deduce that it was also a time of intellectual and religious ferment, with new theological and ritual concepts coming to enhance or replace older forms. This is when we first begin to hear of the Druids as a class of philosophers, ritualists and juridical experts with enormous social prestige and power, educated in schools and organized in a network that transcended the narrow tribal boundaries of the Celtic world. Although they are only mentioned in relation to Gaul and Britain (where they reputedly had their origin and the greatest concentration of their power), they may have extended their influence over other Celtic areas as well. No doubt such an institution did a lot to promote religious speculation and debate and must have given rise to a great wealth of new mythological and ritual forms – which we, unfortunately, cannot know in detail, since the Druids never used writing to record their teachings, relying instead on the traditional exercise of memory.

By the middle of the 3rd century BCE the Romans, who vividly remembered their humiliation in 390 BCE, began to grow more and more uneasy about their Celtic neighbors in Italy, whom they saw as a powerful, culturally alien people that could not be trusted. Between 225 and 123 BCE Roman military campaigns (often under the pretense of defending important Greek trading centers from supposed Celtic threats) succeeded in breaking Celtic political control over all of Spain, Cisalpine Gaul and the southern third of Transalpine Gaul (Gallia Narbonensis). Despite fierce opposition, all these areas were placed under Roman administration. Celtic institutions were replaced by Roman institutions.

By the turn of the 1st century BCE, then, Rome had become an overwhelming political presence in western Europe. Even those Celtic tribes that remained independent found their economic life shaped by Roman decisions. The southernmost tribes of Free Gaul – the Aruerni and Aedui, for instance – abandoned their monarchical system of government (the "sacred king" model) in favor of rule by magistrates elected for a single term (*uergobreti*). Some scholars have seen this as a yielding to Roman pressure: Republican Rome wanted to ensure that its trading partners had a political culture similar to its own (making them "safe" and predictable), and so encouraged an institution that was more or less based on the Roman concept of the consulate (cf. Cunliffe1997). This seems corroborated by the fact that rebellions against Roman rule often involved attempts to restore traditional monarchy. Around this time the same Gallic tribes began to concentrate their political and economic life in large walled towns (*oppida*).

Population shifts in northern Europe (probably in response to climatic changes) caused a large number of Germanic-speaking peoples to migrate into traditionally Celtic lands. This, of course, resulted in further conflict and instability. In 58 BCE Julius Caesar took advantage of the situation by providing military aid to some Celtic tribes against others, eventually using his presence on the field to establish Roman rule over the entirety of Gaul – despite the powerful last-minute rebellion mounted against him by the Aruernian prince Vercingetorix. By 50 BCE (and despite some later, ineffective rebellions) Roman control over Gaul was completely secure, and many Gallic leaders had been persuaded to accept it.

Julius Caesar had invaded Britain during his Gallic campaign but failed to conquer it. This was accomplished a century later (43-51 CE), under the reign of the emperor Claudius. Since the Druids, through their intertribal network, provided a sophisticated ideological resource for continuing to oppose Roman rule, it was in the interest of the Roman government to eliminate them, and the conquest of Britain (where the Druids' most prestigious training centers were) gave them the opportunity to do so. In 60 CE Suetonius Paulinus, the military governor of Britain, destroyed the great Druid centre on Mona (present-day Anglesey) and massacred the Druids there. This effectively put an end to Druid influence throughout most of the Celtic world and removed one of the main obstacles to complete Romanization.

By the end of the 1st century CE, Ireland alone of all Celtic lands remained outside Roman control – although the Irish traded with the Romans and were certainly in frequent contact with the Roman world. Nevertheless, because of its marginal position, Irish tradition remained somewhat conservative: the Druidic institution survived there, as did the "sacred king" model of territorial rule.

Archaeologists refer to the Late Iron Age as the "La Tène" period, after a site on the lake of Neuchâtelin Switzerland, where a large number of weapons and ornaments had been thrown into the water, apparently as a religious offering.

# The Origin of the Celts - Archaeology, Suggested reading

Some important archaeological sites:

**GERMANY**

Schwarzenbach

Kleinaspergle

Waldalgesheim

Rodenbach

Pfalzfeld

Fellbach-Schmiden

Manching-Steinbichel

Holzhausen

München-Obermenzing

Altmühl

Giengen

Klettham

Hochscheid

Bescheid

Reinheim

Niederzier

**DENMARK**

Gundestrup

Brä

(The cauldrons found at these sites are almost certainly of foreign origin)

**SWITZERLAND**

La Tène

Erstfeld

Saint-Sulpice

Yverdon

**FRANCE**

Entremont

Roquepertuse

Ensérune

Somme-Bionne

Bussy-le-Château

Épernay

Berru

Suippes

Conflans

Gournay-sur-Aronde

Ribemont

Amfreville

Mont-Beuvray

Basse-Yutz

Saunières

Besançon

Aurillac

Bourges

Lasgrai'sses

Euffigneix

Neuvy-en-Sullias

Bouray-sur-Juine

Chamalières

Roanne

Agris

**BELGIUM**

Léglise

Ville-sur-Retourne

Frasne-lez-Buissenal

Leval-Trahegnies

**LUXEMBOURG**

Goeblingen-Nospelt

**NETHERLANDS**

Nijmegen

**BRITAIN**

Maiden Castle

Uffington

Danebury

Arras/Wetwang Slack

Aylesford

Hayling Island

Llyn Cerrig Bach

Snettisham

Dún Beag

Dún Càrlabhagh

**IRELAND**

Knocknashee

Caherdrinny

Dún Aonghusa

Dún Conchobhair

Dún Eochla

Rathgall

Navan Fort (Emain Macha)

Rath Cruachain

Dún Ailinne

Tara

Benagh

Spinan Hills

**SPAIN**

Numantia

Botorrita

Pe–alba de Villastar

Lara de los Infantes

Las Cogotas

Segobriga

Nemetobriga

**PORTUGAL**

Chão de Lamas

Guiaes

Lezenho

Vilas Boas

Citania de Sanfins

**ITALY**

Carzaghetto/Cannetto sull' Oglio

Lonato

Benacci

Monte Bibele

Ceretolo

Saliceta San Giuliano

Montefortino

Santa Paolina di Filottrano

Moscano di Fabriano

Santa Canosa in Puglia

**AUSTRIA**

Dürrnberg

Pottenbrźnn

Mannersdorf

**CZECH REPUBLIC**

Chynov

Drouzkovice

Duchcov

Mšecké Éehrovice

Horni Ksely

Brno-Malomerice

Chlum

**SLOVAKIA**

Izkovice

Vel'ky Grob

Drna

Palárikovo

**HUNGARY**

Sopron

Kosd

Szárazd Regöly

Szob

**CROATIA**

Batina

**SERBIA**

Gajic

Gomolava

Mala Vrbica-Ajmana Beograd-Karaburma

**POLAND**

Iwanowice

**ROMANIA**

Piscolt

Ciumesti

**BULGARIA**

Mezek

**UKRAINE**

Kerch

Galis Lovacka

**TURKEY**

Karalar

Tabanlioglu Kale

Selective list of noteworthy artifacts:

**Vessels:**

Schwarzenbach cup (Germany)

Basse-Yutz flagons (France)

Gundestrup cauldron (Denmark; prob. from Eastern Europe)

Aylesford bucket (Britain)

Buckets from Goeblingen-Nospelt (Luxembourg)

Bronze mounts for wooden jugs from Brno-Malomerice (Czech Republic)

**Warrior gear:**

Agris helmet (France)

Berru helmet (France)

Helmet from Santa Canosa in Puglia (Italy)

Ciumesti helmet (Romania)

Waterloo Bridge helmet (Britain)

Benacci helmet (Italy)

Amfreville helmet (France)

Battersea shield (Britain)

Washingborough shield (Britain)

Wandsworth shield boss (Britain)

Horned pony cap from Torrs (Britain)

Horse mask from Stanwick (Britain)

Sword scabbard from Standlake (Britain)

Bronze scabbard-plate from the Bann (Ireland)

Sword and scabbard from Kosd (Hungary)

Tesson sword (France)

Phalerae (circular metallic pieces to ornament a horse's harness):

Bronze phalera from Cuperly (France)

Silver phalera from Ch‹o de Lamas (Portugal)

Large silver phalera from Brescia (Italy)

Bronze phalera from Somme-Bionne (France)

Bronze and enamel harness ornament from Kerch (Ukraine)

**Personal adornments:**

Rodenbach armlet (Germany)

Silver armlet from Guiaes (Portugal)

Trichtingen torc (Germany)

Waldalgesheim torc (Germany)

Snettisham torc (Britain)

Fenouillet torc (France)

Vilas Boas gold torc (Portugal)

Gold torcs from Erstfeld (Switzerland)

Montans torc (France)

Mailly-le-Camp torc (France)

Ardnaglug torc (Ireland)

Gold bracelets and earrings from La Butte Sainte-Colombe (France)

Gold necklace with pendants from Szárazd Regöly (Hungary)

Bronze brooch from Carratiermes (Spain)

Bronze pendant from Skryje (Czech Republic)

Monteferrino earrings (Italy)

Gold diadem from Elvi–a (Spain)

"Petrie" crown (Ireland)

Broighter gold treasure-hoard (Ireland)

Statuary and ritual sculpture:

Stone head from Mšecké Éehrovice (Czech Republic)

Ritual sculptures from Roquepertuse temple (France)

Boar deity from Euffigneix (France)

Seated deity from Bouray-sur-Juine (France)

Holzgerlingen deity (Germany)

Wooden stags from Feldbach-Schmiden ritual shaft (Germany)

Stone cippus from Kermaria (Brittany)

Stone cippus from Pfalzfeld (Germany)

Stone cippus from Waldbuch (Germany)

Stone cippus from Turoe (Ireland)

Some basic reading:

Cunliffe "The Ancient Celts": pp. 68-90 (The Migrations); pp. 91-110 (Warfare and Society); pp. 111-132 (Arts); pp. 133-144 (Iberia); pp. 145-167 (Atlantic Celts); pp. 168-182 (Eastern Celts); pp. 183-210 (Religion); pp. 211-234 (Last Phases of the Iron Age).

James "The World of the Celts": pp. 33-49 (The Celtic Lands); pp. 50-71 (The Patterns of Life); pp. 72-85 (The Celts at War); pp. 86-103 (Gods and the Afterlife); pp. 104-115 (La Tène Art and Technology).

Rizzoli "The Celts": pp. 127-192 (The Formation of the La Tène Culture – Fifth Century BC); pp. 195-300 (The First Historical Expansion – Fourth Century BC); pp. 303-386 (The Age of the Warriors – Third Century BC); pp. 389-408 (The Celts of Iberia); pp. 411-552 (The Era of the Oppida – Second/First Century BC); pp. 555-618 (The Island Celts).

Other important sources:

CUNLIFFE, Barry: *Iron Age Communities in Britain* Henley & Boston, 1974 [revised 1978].

GREEN, Miranda. ed.: *The Celtic World*. London & New York, 1995. NASH, Daphne: *Coinage in the Celtic World*. London, 1987.

RAFTERY, Barry: *Pagan Celtic Ireland: The Enigma of the Irish Iron Age*. London & New York, 1994.

ROSS, Anne: *The Pagan Celts* (originally *Everyday Life of the Pagan Celts*). Totowa, NJ, 1986 [London & New York, 1970].

Daithi O'Hogain's *Celtic Warriors* (New York, 1999) has an extremely useful extended appendix giving a detailed description of the political groupings of the Celts in the later Iron Age.

Some essential Classical sources on Iron Age Celtic history:

CAESAR: *De bello gallico* (The Gallic War).

DIODORUS SICULUS: The Library of History (esp. Book V).

LIVY (TITUS LIVIUS): The History of Rome (esp. Books V and XXI).

POLYBIUS: Histories (esp. Book II).

STRABO: Geography.

# The Origin of the Celts - Worksheet

QUESTIONS

A. General.

1. Identify the following and indicate where they belong geographically:
    - Tylis
    - Noricum
    - Allobroges
    - Aedui
    - Insubres
    - Ordovices
    - Atrebates
    - Gallaeci
    - Tolistobogii
    - Carnutes
    - Morini
    - Salyes
    - Scordisci
    - Boii
2. Identify the following figures and discuss their historical role:
    - Vercingetorix
    - Dumnorix
    - Diviciacus
    - Acichorius

- ❖ Deiotaros
- ❖ Bellovesus and Segovesus
- ❖ Viriathus
- ❖ Commius
- ❖ Caratacus
- ❖ Boudicca

3. Discuss the circumstances that led to Caesar's campaign in Gaul. What tribal migration
   precipitated Roman intervention?
4. Which Celtic community in Spain resisted Rome with particular fierceness? Name it and place the story of its defeat in historical context.
5. Describe the historical circumstances of Celtic military expeditions to:
   a) Rome;
   b) Greece;
   c) Asia Minor.
6. Compare the battles of Gergovia and Alesia in the context of the conquest of Gaul.
7. What happened to Celtic communities in Eastern Europe in the course of the 1st century BCE?
8. What archaeological sites illustrate the political importance of the region between the
   Marne and the Moselle after the mid-5th century BCE? Describe some of the evidence.
9. What is the Arras culture? What makes it particularly distinctive in its contemporary context?
10. Why did Barry Raftery subtitle his book "The Enigma of the Irish Iron Age"? What distinguishes Ireland during this period?

B. Society

1. From the information in Classical sources, describe a typical political unit of the late Iron Age Celtic world. In what ways is it like a "tribe", and in what other ways is it like a "state"?

2. What does the evidence from burial sites tell us about Celtic society at this time?
3.
    i] From both archaeological and Classical sources, describe typical houses of the period.
    ii] What might have distinguished aristocratic from commoners' houses?
4.
    i] Compare the fortifications of the following settlement types:1) a broch; 2) a wheelhouse; 3) a ringfort; 4) an oppidum.
    ii] What does this suggest about the social arrangements implied in each model?
5.
    i] What were the principal crops being farmed?
    ii] What types of animals were domesticated?
5. Fosterage was an important institution in aristocratic Celtic communities of the Early
   Middle Ages. What evidence suggests that it may already have been in practice in the Later Iron Age?

C. Warfare

1.
    i] Describe the typical panoply of a Celtic warrior in terms of:
        a. helmet;
        b. shield;
        c. sword.
    ii] How (if at all) did the shape and size of these articles change between the 5th and the 1st century BCE, and what were some of the regional variations?
    iii] What would distinguish ornamental or ceremonial weapons from practical ones?
2. Which Celtic practices in battle struck Classical writers as particularly unusual or alien?
    i] What was it that bound Celtic warriors together as a unit?
    ii] Describe the similarities and differences between warrior-bands defending a territory, and warrior-bands on an expedition for plunder.

iii] Give specific examples of both.

3. Give examples of the importance of cavalry in Celtic warfare and describe archaeological evidence of the relationship between warriors and their horses (especially in the realm of adornment).
4.
    i] Discuss chariot warfare.
    ii] What historical evidence do we have of it?
    iii] What later literary evidence?
5. What was it that the Romans called a *murus gallicus*?

D. Religion

1.
    i] What are the Classical sources that refer to the Druids?
    ii] Which parts of the Celtic world do they concern?
2. According to the Classical sources, what were the specifically religious duties of the Druids?
3. Describe what it is that convinces us of the religious associations of the following archaeological sites:
    - Entremont
    - Roquepertuse
    - Ribemont
    - Gournay-sur-Aronde
    - Fellbach-Schmiden
    - Hayling Island

E. Art and Technology

1. What is the "Vegetal Style"? Describe its origins and its evolution within the Celtic world.
2. Describe metalworking techniques of the Celtic Iron Age.
3.
    i] List at least six kinds of animals commonly represented in Celtic art, giving

specific examples for each one.

ii] What, given the context of the representation, might each animal symbolize

4. Give examples of the use of the disembodied human head as a decorative motif.
5.
   i] Which motifs in Iron Age Celtic art have a clearly Oriental origin?
   ii] How did they change when they became a part of Celtic tradition?
6.
   i] Discuss some of the images used on Celtic coins.
   ii] What are their Classical models, and how do the Celtic representations diverge from them?
   iii] Name some of the motifs that were used as distinguishing images in the coinage of different Celtic groups.
7. Compare styles of pottery from different parts of the Iron Age Celtic world.
8.
   i] Describe evidence of extensive roadbuilding in the pre-Roman Celtic world.
   ii] What other very important aspect of Celtic technology developed in tandem
   with this project?
9.
   i] What was Late Iron Age clothing like?
   ii] What textiles were used?

# The Celts Under Roman Rule (50 BCE-450 CE)

The imposition of Roman rule on most of the Celtic world fundamentally transformed Celtic society. Although Celtic languages appear to have survived on the Continent for several centuries in rural areas and among the most conservative aristocratic families, Latin was the only medium of public discourse. The prestige and influence of the Druids was gone, and native leaders could gain power only through dealing with Roman institutions.

However, some aspects of Celtic tradition were able to remain in place despite

Romanization. The Romans recognized the integrity of the old tribal territories and made them a part of the new administrative system, so that local populations retained their original tribal identities (many of the modern French provinces still reflect these tribal divisions: Poitou for the Pictaui, Saintonge for the Santones, Limousin for the Lemouices, Auvergne for the Aruerni, etc.). Also, some historians have suggested that the Roman shift from Republic to Empire may actually have made many Celts more comfortable with Roman rule, since it produced something broadly comparable with the more traditional "sacred king" model of political organization (cf Romain *Histoire de la Gaule*1996). Certainly the Emperor Augustus seems to have been catering to such a feeling when he formally assumed the Sovereignty of Gaul in 10 BCE.

In the religious domain, the Romans tended to identify local deities with similar figures in the Graeco-Roman pantheon: we call this the *interpretatio Romana*. Conquered populations were then encouraged to worship their traditional gods as aspects of Mercury, Mars, Jupiter, Minerva, etc, mixing their native attributes with the more widespread Classical ones. Older Celtic places of worship became the sites of Roman-style temples containing representations of the gods in their new guises, complete with written dedications giving both their original Celtic names and their assumed Roman identities. Since native written records of Celtic religion from pre-Roman times are extremely rare, the heritage of the *interpretatio Romana* is, ironically, a treasure-trove for those interested in getting concrete information on the Celtic gods and their worship. Archaeological investigation of temple sites from all over the Celtic areas of the Continent and Britain suggests that native patterns of religious practice were maintained there despite a veneer of Romanization.

The same applied to the general patterns of rural life. While the Romans spread their urban network north into Gaul and Britain, bringing with it a style of life that was new to the Celts (as well as an ethnically mixed population), in the countryside many of the same goods continued to be produced as before, using similar methods, with little disruption of community organization. The delightful representational sculptures (mostly from the 3rd century CE) found in the city of Trier (the tribal capital of the Treueri, today a part of the German Rhineland) depict a people essentially Celtic in their material culture. Celtic products and fashions not only held their own, but even spread to other parts of the Empire, and many Celtic words were borrowed into spoken Latin.

In the course of the 5$^{th}$ century the Western Roman Empire collapsed under the weight

of its economic and political problems. Its institutions (including its ability to defend itself) broke down, its vassal peoples revolted, and the Germanic tribes that had been held at bay east of the Rhine became free to invade and take over. What remained of Celtic identity on the Continent was unable to survive the death-throes of Roman society during this period.

In Ireland and Britain, however, Celtic-speaking communities continued to thrive. While the southeast of Britain had been heavily Romanized, around the middle of the 5th century the first English settlers crossed the North Sea and established themselves on the island, putting an end to the Roman institutions and the culture they had sustained. This gave Celtic culture an opportunity to re-assert itself, and for chieftains from the non-Romanized north of Britain to take advantage of the political vacuum and establish their control over the south. They were unable to stop the English onslaught, but eventually the westward movement of the invaders slowed when it reached the banks of the Severn and the Tamar, leaving what lay beyond to the Celts.

Some Important Sites

**IRELAND**

Drumanagh [Roman garrison and trading post] Lambay Island

**BRITAIN**

Bath (Aquae Sulis)
Lydney
Carrawburgh (and other sites along Hadrian's Wall) Cirencester
Gloucester
Wroxeter
Nettleton Shrub
Corbridge
Buxton
Hayling Island

**FRANCE**

Alésia (Alise Ste-Reine)

Autun

Grand

Bourbonne-Lancy (Bourbonne-les-Bains)

Vichy

Aix-les-Bains

Orange

Nîmes

**GERMANY**

Trier

Mainz

Hochscheid

Pesch

**SPAIN**

Lugo (and environs)

Some basic reading:

Cunliffe "The Ancient Celts": pp.247-261.; James "The World of the Celts": pp.128-151

Good works for basic reference on the period:

WELLS, Colin: *The Roman Empire* (1995)

CAMERON, Averil: *The Later Roman Empire: A.D. 284-430* (1993)

LUTTWAK, Edward M. & GILLIAM, J.F.: *Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century A.D, to the Third* (1979)

SCARRE, Chris: *The Penguin Historical Atlas of Ancient Rome* (1995)

STARR, Chester: *The Roman Empire, 27 BC - AD 476: A Study in Survival* (1983)

Suggested reading:

BOWMAN, Alan K.: *Life and Letters on the Roman Frontier: Vindolanda and Its People* (1998)

CURCHIN, L.A.: *Roman Spain: Conquest and Assimilation* (1991)

DERKS, Tom: *Gods, Temples and Ritual Practices: The Transformation of Religious Ideas and*

*Values in Roman Gaul* (Amsterdam Archaeological Studies #2, 1999)

DRINKWATER, J.F.: *Roman Gaul: The Three Provinces, 58 BC - AD 200* (1983)

HALL, Jenny & JONES, Christine: *Roman Britain* (1997)

HENIG, Martin: *The Heirs of King Verica: Culture and Politics in Roman Britain* (2002)

JONES, Barri & MATTINGLY, David: *An Atlas of Roman Britain* (1990)

KEAY, S.J.: *Roman Spain* (1988)

KING, Anthony: *Roman Gaul and Germany* (Exploring the Roman World, vol. 3 – U of Cal., 1990)

RAFTERY, Barry: *Pagan Celtic Ireland* (Chapter 9, "Beyond the Empire") (1994)

SALWAY, Peter: *The Roman Era: The British Isles, 55 BC - 410 AD* (Short Oxford History of the British isles)

SCULLARD, H. H.: *Roman Britain: Outpost of the Empire* (1986)

VAN DAM, Raymond: *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (1985)

WEBSTER, Graham: *Celtic Religion in Roman Britain* (1986)

WIGHTMAN, E.M.: *Gallia Belgica* (1985)

WOOLF, Greg: *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (2000)

QUESTIONS

1. Identify the following and place them in historical context:
    - Sacrovir
    - Civilis and Velleda
    - Carausius and Allectus
    - Ambrosius Aurelianus
    - Maximus Imperator
    - The "Bagaudae"
    - Ausonius
2. Imagine that you are a Celt living in a territory under Roman rule. How does foreign rule affect you in the following areas:
    - the language you speak.
    - the organization and appearance of your community.
    - political leadership in your community.
    - your economic relations with the outside world.
    - the formal practice of your religion.
3. What is the "plomb du Larzac"? Explain its significance and indicate what it tells

us about Celtic culture in the early centuries of Roman rule.

4. Imagine you are a Roman legionary serving in a garrison at Hadrian's Wall. What kinds of relations to you have with the local Celtic population? What separates you from them? What brings you together? Now imagine the situation from a native Celtic farmer's point of view.
5. Choose three samples of the lively representational art from Roman Trier. Which features in the represented scenes suggest continuations of Celtic culture? Which suggest Roman influence?

# Early Christian Celtdom (ca. 400-1150)

By the time the Western Empire collapsed, Christianity had become its dominant religion. The Church was organized on a hierarchical diocesan model that was closely patterned after the secular Roman administrative system, drawing its resources almost entirely from urban centers. Little effort had been made to Christianize the countryside; so when the cities – and all the institutions of Roman government – fell apart, the Church was left with little in the way of a power base. The new Germanic overlords were either heretical Christians with no great incentive to help the Roman hierarchy, or non-Christians who had to be converted from scratch and whose every whim had to be entertained in order to ensure their continued cooperation. In this weakened state the Roman Church simply didn't have the means to coordinate its policies effectively, or to enforce a conformity of belief and practice throughout its vast jurisdiction. So non-Romanized Celtic areas like Ireland and northern Britain were free to absorb Christianity gradually, through the scattered efforts of individual missionaries who had no secular arm to back them up and no invading army to impose the new religion by force. This meant that Celtic communities had the time to adapt Christianity to their own culture and to devise native Christian institutions that were better suited to their tradition.

Originally the Roman Church had established a diocesan system similar to the one that already existed on the Continent. However, this met with a lukewarm reception in the Celtic world, where there were no cities that could serve as clearly-defined diocesan centers. What caught the imagination of the Celts instead was the concept of monasticism, which had

spread into the Christian world from Egypt. The idea of a group of monks who lived as the extended family of an abbot (their adoptive father) on land that was granted to them by a territorial chieftain made perfect sense in the context of Celtic social tradition. Monastic asceticism was also a heroic ideal that appealed to the aristocratic warrior-caste. Although the history of Celtic monasticism is quite complex, it seems to have developed from two main sources: 1) poorly-documented but certainly authentic early contacts with the East, probably Egypt and Syria; and 2) the communities founded by St Martin of Tours, the great missionary-monk of 4th century Gaul. In the latter part of the 5th century a group of very active communities in South Wales served as the inspiration for most of the important early monastic foundations in Ireland. During the 6th century the Irish monastic movement flourished to an extraordinary extent, becoming in many ways the creative vanguard of Celtic culture. The custom of *peregrinatio pro Deo* ("exile for the sake of God") led many enthusiastic missionaries to travel far from their native lands and found new monasteries throughout the Celtic world and beyond. Abbots were revered as spiritual masters who established their own norms of conduct and their own styles of worship within their communities. This emphasis on autonomy prevented any single set of standards from establishing itself throughout the Celtic Christian world, which remained astonishingly diverse.

Celtic Christian leaders were, naturally, not at all in favor of encouraging the survival of pre-Christian beliefs and practices, and occasionally denounced them publicly. This, however, had little effect on the general population, which continued those practices that were relevant to the agricultural cycle, sometimes converting deities into saints to make them more acceptable to Christian authorities. More problematic was the relation of the Church to the Druidic/ bardic institution, which had provided Celtic culture with its intellectual and historical resources, especially knowledge of the mythological precedents on which the social and legal traditions of the Celtic world were based (since Christianization had not come with foreign invasion and the imposition of alien social and cultural norms, Celtic society was still dependent on native institutions with clear pre-Christian roots). Stories like that of St Colm Cille of Iona defending bardic privileges at the assembly of Druim Ceat ca. 580 suggest that, after some initial conflict, an accommodation was sought between the Christian and pre-Christian cultural authorities. In Ireland the Druidic institution survived in the guise of *filid* ("seers" – ie, poets), *senchaide* (loremasters) and *brithemon* ("brehons", judges), who set

about transmitting the essential lore of the culture while re-composing and re-organizing it to avoid clashes with Christian belief and practice. The great body of consistent, authoritative lore that served as the justification for all laws and customs was "updated" to make it operative in a Christian world. One of the fruits of this search for a new cultural standard was the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (Book of the Conquests of Ireland), compiled between the 9th and 12th centuries, which harmonized several native mythological traditions with the historical framework of the Bible, while eliminating all explicit mention of the worship of deities or other non-Christian beliefs. (Although our evidence from Celtic Britain is much spottier, the Latin works of Nennius and Geoffrey of Monmouth make it clear that the re-composition of native historical lore occurred there, too.)

"Writing" about old traditions was made possible by the legacy of Christianity. Since it was a religion founded on a sacred text, it encouraged literacy. At first Latin was the sole medium for writing, and literature in the Celtic vernaculars continued to be passed down orally in the traditional way, but gradually the Latin writing system was adapted to the native languages as well. By the 8th-9th centuries, literacy in the Celtic languages had become commonplace among educated clerics.

Despite the loss of vast territories to the English, some new Celtic communities appeared during this period. Colonists from Britain had begun settling on the Armorican peninsula of Gaul by the 3rd century CE, but in the aftermath of the English invasion they were joined by such huge numbers of refugees that the ethnic composition of the population was significantly altered, so that the region was re-named Brittany, reflecting the British origin of its inhabitants. At the other end of the Celtic world, territorial disputes in northeastern Ireland during the 5th century led to an Irish settlement in northern Britain, establishing the kingdom of Dál Riata in what is now Argyll. By the 9th century this Gaelic kingdom had merged with the native kingdom of the Picts to create a new entity, Scotland.

It was from the Columban monastery of Iona, itself a part of the nascent Scottish Gaelic community, that a highly successful missionary movement was sent in the direction of the English kingdom of Northumbria, implanting Celtic ideas of Christian community in northern England. One of its fruits was Lindisfarne, a mixed Irish-English monastery which seems to have been the starting-point for the brilliant tradition of Celtic manuscript illumination, a new vocabulary of Oriental interlace and developed La Tène geometric patterns which art historians refer to as the "Hiberno-Saxon" style (and the style that most people first think of

whenever "Celtic art" is mentioned). This style spread throughout the Celtic world (especially in monasteries of the Columban lineage), eventually producing masterpieces like the Book of Kells, and becoming adapted to other mediums, like stone sculpture.

By the end of the 6th century Celtic missionaries on *peregrinatio* (mostly from Ireland, but also initially from South Wales) had begun to found monasteries on the Continent, where they helped confirm the population's allegiance to Christianity and provided much-needed assistance to the weakened and often incompetent Roman Church outposts in Gaul and Germany. Yet even as the Roman hierarchy welcomed these new auxiliaries, it was made uneasy by their nonconformist practices. Because of the lack of regular communication between Rome and the Celtic world from ca. 450 to ca. 600, many of the important developments in Roman practice – the change in the method of calculating the date of Easter, the standardization of the Roman rite (the Celts used the Gallican rite), etc. – never reached Celtic Christian communities. Once regular links were re-established, most Celtic Christian leaders, unimpressed by what they saw of the Roman clergy and jealous of their autonomy, refused to change their traditional practices in favor of Roman standards. This led to continual clashes between Celtic-trained and Roman-trained churchmen, although Celtic Christians never banded together in a self-organized "Celtic Church" that opposed Roman jurisdiction. Roman authorities won the compliance of individual Celtic communities piecemeal, over a period of several centuries. One major turning-point in the process was the Synod of Whitby in 664, when the English kingdom of Northumbria abandoned the Celtic practices it had received and replaced them with Roman practices. This led many other communities (especially the prestigious monasteries of the Columban lineage) to follow suit.

However, this didn't lead to an immediate decline of the unique creative spirit in Celtic Christian tradition. The greatest masterpieces of Celtic Christian art and Old Irish poetry (with its unusual appreciation of unspoiled nature) were produced long after Whitby. During the 8th and 9th centuries in Ireland a movement called the Cél' Dé (Companions of God, "Culdees") reacted against what they perceived as the "worldliness" of Roman practices by restoring the contemplative asceticism of earlier centuries. What really contributed to the weakening of the Celtic monastic tradition were the Viking raids which, starting at the end of the 8th century, plundered the monasteries and destroyed their libraries. With the eclipse of the monasteries the Roman Church could successfully re-assert the importance of the diocesan model it had been backing all along.

During the 11th and 12th centuries the Roman Church made sweeping changes in its structure and practices (introducing clerical celibacy and a more powerful central role for the Pope) that resulted in an institution more like the Catholic Church of modern times. It took several centuries for all of these changes to take root everywhere in the Celtic world. One of the methods chosen to implement the changes was the creation of new monastic orders (like the Cistercians) committed to the spirit of the new Church. Once these orders established monasteries headed by non-Celtic abbots in Celtic lands, and non-native prelates were placed in key administrative positions everywhere, native Celtic practices lost all support in high places. In 1152 the Synod of Kells officially abolished all native idiosyncracies in the Irish liturgy. The takeover of Celtic religious institutions by mostly Anglo-Norman prelates prepared the ground for the political takeover of most Celtic lands by Anglo-Norman feudal lords.

Some important sites:

**IRELAND:**

Clonard

Clonmacnoise

Derry

Durrow

Kells

Lagore

Killeany

Clonfert

Monasterboice

**SCOTLAND:**

Iona

WALES:

Llanilltud

Bardsey Island (Ynys Enlli)

Caldey Island (Ynys Pyr)

**ENGLAND:**

Sutton Hoo

Lindisfarne

**CORNWALL:**

Padstow

**BRITTANY:**

Landevennek

**THE CONTINENT:**

St. Gall

Luxeuil

Annegray

Péronne

Würzburg

Some basic reading:

Cunliffe "The Ancient Celts": pp.258-267; James "The World of the Celts" pp. 162-175; Rizzoli "The Celts" pp. 618-662

Other suggested reading:

Basic history:

CHARLES-EDWARDS, T.M. *Early Christian Ireland*. 2001.

CLARKE, Howard (Ed.). *Ireland and Scandinavia in the Early Viking Age*. 1998.

DAVIES, Wendy. *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*. 1982.

LAING, Lloyd & Jenny. *The Picts and the Scots*. 1993.

NIELKE, Margaret R. (Ed.) & DRISCOLL, S.T. (Ed.). *Power and Politics in Early Medieval Britain and Ireland*. 1998.

O CORRAIN, Donnchadh. *Ireland Before the Normans*. 2003.

O CROININ, D‡ibh'. *Early Medieval Ireland 400-1200 (Longman History of Ireland)*. 1995.

RICHTER, Michael. *Ireland and Her Neighbours in the Seventh Century*. 1999.

SMITH, Julia M.H. *Province and Empire: Brittany and the Carolingians*. 1992.

Society, economy, world-view:

AITCHISON, N.B. *Armagh and the Royal Centres in Early Medieval Ireland: Monuments, Cosmology, and the Past*. 1994.

BITEL, Lisa M. *Land of Women: Tales of Sex and Gender From Early Ireland*. 1996.

CUMMINS, W.A. *The Picts and Their Symbols*. 1999.

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QUESTIONS

1. Locate and discuss the following political entities:
    - ❖ Dál Riata
    - ❖ Daln-Araide
    - ❖ Deheubarth
    - ❖ Bro-Waroc'h
    - ❖ Eoghanachta
    - ❖ Airgialla

- ❖ Dési
- ❖ Osraige
- ❖ Elmet
- ❖ Rheged
- ❖ Poher
- ❖ U' Liatháin
- ❖ U' Echan Coba

2. Identify the following and put them in historical context:
   - ❖ Colm Cille
   - ❖ Columbanus of Bobbio
   - ❖ Ite
   - ❖ Melangell
   - ❖ Maelgwn Gwynedd
   - ❖ Samson of Dol
   - ❖ Caoimgen of Glenn D‡ Loch
   - ❖ Gobnait
   - ❖ Paul Aurelian
   - ❖ Kenneth McAlpine [Cinnaed Mac Albainn]
   - ❖ Dewi Sant
   - ❖ Ciarán of Saigir
   - ❖ Ciarán of Cluain Mic Nois
3. Put yourself in the position of:
   a) a local ruler;
   b) his wife;
   c) a landowner with commercial activities;
   d) a small farmer;
   e) a bondsman;
   f) a bondswoman;
   g) a druid – in a Celtic region that is just becoming aware of Christianity.

   In each case, which arguments would incline you to adopt Christianity? Which arguments would work the other way?
4. Choose a page each out of:

a) the Book of Lindisfarne;
b) the Book of Durrow;
c) the Book of Kells.

Which aspects of the style seem to continue elements in earlier Celtic art? Which aspects seem to be innovations? Can you suggest where specific innovations came from?

5. Imagine that you are a legal expert in early medieval Ireland, and you are called open to give counsel in the following cases:
   a) the plaintiff is a woman whose husband has been publicizing intimate details of their sexual relationship.
   b) the accused is a man who made a contract of cooperation with a neighbor when drunk and reneged on the deal when he was sober.
   c) the accused is a man who has killed a blacksmith and kept it secret, concealing the body.

   In each case. which course of action would you suggest to the chieftain delivering the judgment?
6. Imagine that you are a legal expert in early medieval Wales, and you are called open to give counsel in the following cases:
   a) the plaintiff is a woman who became pregnant after a consensual encounter with a man in which he falsely promised a permanent relationship.
   b) the accused is a man who killed a cat that guarded the chieftain's barn.
   c) the accused is a man who publicly insulted the king.

   In each case. which course of action would you suggest to the chieftain delivering the judgment?
7. You are a wealthy 7th-century Irish farmer with four sons and a daughter. What are some likely ways the inheritance will be dealt with?
8. You are a woman and the only child of a wealthy 9th-century Irish farmer. What will you inherit? Your husband is a Welshman. What will your own children inherit?
9. What was the custom of *peregrinatio*? How did it contribute to the spread of Christianity?
10. What were red, green and white martyrdom?

11. Give and discuss four examples of Celtic Christian appreciation of wild nature.

# The Celts Under Feudalism (1150-ca. 1500)

During the 12th and 13th centuries Anglo-Norman feudal lords took control of most of Ireland and Wales, with the Church's blessing. Feudal norms of land use and social hierarchy largely replaced the small tribal monarchies that had been the norm in the Celtic world. Native Celtic lineages that had kept their hold on power had to find a niche within the new order of feudalism. Even in Scotland and Brittany, which remained independent countries under native rulers, social institutions inspired by international feudalism gradually gained in influence, marginalizing the native Celtic heritage.

Yet the feudal lords, even though they fiercely repressed all political or religious dissent, weren't cultural imperialists. Many of them learned Celtic languages and appreciated native literary traditions. The representatives of the trained bardic orders – the *filid* in Ireland, the *beirdd* or *prydyddion* in Wales – received their patronage and composed praise-poems in their honour. Praise-poetry in the Celtic world wasn't mere flattery and stroking of aristocratic egos: since the bards derived their power from the Otherworld and served as the mouthpieces of the deities of sovereignty, by publicly praising a ruler they legitimized his rule. Thus by transferring their allegiance to the new overlords they smoothed the transition of Celtic communities into the new social realities of feudal Europe and adapted those realities to Celtic tradition.

Although not all of them were drawn to their subjects' culture, many Anglo-Norman aristocrats found themselves "going native" – using Celtic tongues as their primary languages, and even resorting to native Celtic jurisprudence rather than feudal law for the settling of legal cases (especially since native law was often more flexible and convenient than feudal law in dealing with such matters as divorce, remarriage, and the disposal of inheritance). This caused enough concern in England that in 1366 the Statutes of Kilkenny were passed, forbidding Anglo-Norman settlers from following Irish customs. Such laws, however, were largely ignored: the Gaelicization of the newcomers continued unabated.

During this period there was a major literary flowering of all the Celtic languages. Aristocratic lineages (both native and foreign) became fascinated by ancient traditions that enhanced the prestige of their families or of the territories they ruled and were willing to give generous salaries to anyone who could turn up such evidence. Since the monasteries

had lost their special connection with Celtic culture, it was a new class of "literary families" – professionally trained to research and collate manuscript sources – that took on the role of passing down the historical traditions. Much old lore was re- processed in new forms, both in verse and in prose. Most of the manuscript collections that serve as the source for our knowledge of older Celtic literature were written down during this period (although some of the texts they contain are actually much more ancient).

Some of this literary creativity had a major impact outside the Celtic world. Around the 11th century Breton poets and storytellers began to appear as entertainers in French-speaking feudal courts on the Continent, regaling their audiences with adaptations of Celtic mythological tales. Most of these stories were centered on the figure of Arthur, possibly a historical war leader from 5th-century Britain but later revered by British Celts as an ideal sacred king who was expected to return from the dead to be a savior of his people. Numerous pre-Christian mythic patterns related to sacred kingship had become attached to his lore, which had developed in part as a political message of hope for a dispossessed people. While non-Celtic audiences didn't resonate to the political message, they were fascinated by the mythology. Soon new re-tellings and elaborations of this material began to appear in French and German, and later in English. The "Matter of Britain", as this lore was called, came to be an essential part of general European culture, and made the reading public throughout Europe familiar with symbols and themes from Celtic tradition – even if these came to be used in the service of completely different cultural and spiritual agendas.

Meanwhile, the peasantry of Celtic lands continued to practice their traditional rituals to ensure the success of the agricultural cycle. A balance had been struck between the sequences of the Christian and pre-Christian calendars, so that the major ritual occasions of both could coincide without conflict, and pre-Christian practices could find legitimacy by becoming relevant to Christian feasts. The result was a pre-Christian ritual ideology overlaid with Christian iconography. Nevertheless, it made possible a real continuity in Celtic religious culture.

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QUESTIONS

1. Identify the following and place them in historical context:
    - Owain Glyn Dwr
    - Llywelyn the Great
    - Llywelyn ap Gruffydd
    - Jeanne de Penthièvre
    - Thomas Flamank and Myghal An Gov
    - Ruair' O Conchobhair
    - Rhys ap Gruffydd
    - John of Lorn
    - The "Red Comyn"
    - Somerled
    - Alexander III Canmore
    - Maolmaedoc of Armagh
    - Pierre Landais
    - Anne of Brittany
    - Andrew Moray of Bothwell
    - Art Og Mac Murchaidh
    - Thomas Fitzgerald
    - Dafydd ap Gwilym

2. Describe the social and political factors that led to the emergence of the Scottish clan system.
3. What aspects of this system resembled older social models?
4. What aspects were clearly different?
5. Imagine that you are a traditional Celtic chieftain ca. 1350 in:
    - Ireland

- ❖ Wales
- ❖ Scotland
- ❖ Brittany

6. Faced with new overlords seeking to impose a feudal system of government, what options do you have for retaining some of your authority and status?
7. Discuss the impact of Scandinavian political power on Scotland and the Isle of Man.
8. Imagine that you are a traditionally trained:
   - ❖ bard
   - ❖ storyteller

   in a Celtic area with new feudal overlords. The tradition you work with is alien to these overlords, yet you still need to relate to them as your patrons. What strategies might you devise to enable them to appreciate your art?
9. Choose any Celtic region (i.e., an individual tribal area, not an entire country or province) and trace in detail the changes in political control over it that occur between 1150 and 1500.
10. Date and discuss the significance of the following events:
    - ❖ The Treaty of Perth.
    - ❖ The Battle of St-Aubin-du-Cormier.
    - ❖ The Battle of Bannockburn.
    - ❖ The Synod of Kells.

# The Celts Under the Modern States (ca.1500-Present)

By the end of the 15th century the spectacular rise of an urban middle class that owed its success to emergent capitalism had made the feudal system cumbersome and outdated. In its place came the concept of the modern centralized state, served by a bureaucratized administration that directly affected the lives of all citizens. The emphasis on centralization and control led to an ideal of prescribed uniformity for the entire population within a state's borders: all the inhabitants should follow the same religion, speak the same language and have the same culture, share the same sense of historical identity as a nation, etc. This meant that ethnic minorities were denied the right to their cultural autonomy and were often

actively persecuted as threats to the unity of the nation. Since no Celtic community was allowed to form a modern state (Brittany lost its sovereignty in 1532, Scotland in 1707), all the Celts found themselves under the rule of English- or French-oriented political elites. Native elites that resisted this complete loss of autonomy were either massacred or driven into exile, turning the remaining Celtic areas into purely peasant communities. Without the patronage of cultured aristocrats, the native literary class (what remained of the bards) found itself deprived of both an audience and financial support and dwindled rapidly. By the late 1700's, literacy in any Celtic language had become rare (except in Wales, where the translation of the Bible into Welsh and the prevalence of nonconformist Welsh-speaking chapel communities helped keep the language alive at all levels of use until the 20th century). Increasingly centralized and influential educational systems depreciated the Celtic languages and the cultural heritage that came with them, while emphasizing the social importance of identifying with the majority culture.

Economic developments put Celtic communities under even greater stress. The industrial revolution in the 19th century shifted the centers of economic activity to urban areas and drove marginal rural areas into deep poverty. As in most colonial situations, Celtic farmers worked to provide foreign landlords with exportable goods and were left with a limited range of products for their own sustenance. In Ireland small farmers were expected to survive on potatoes, so that when a blight killed most of the potato crop in the 1840's a terrible famine ensued, leading to the death of a million people and massive emigration, mostly to America. Elsewhere, less dramatic crises (for instance, the expropriation of small farmers to make room for large-scale agribusiness projects) resulted in an equally serious drain on Celtic populations. Scattered across the world, the vast majority of these emigrants wound up in culturally alien cities where they abandoned most of their Celtic heritage and assimilated into the majority culture. While there still are Gaelic-speakers in Nova Scotia and Welsh-speakers in Patagonia, they're no more than a tiny remnant within a largely acculturated population.

In the Celtic countries themselves, there was a sharp reduction of the territories where Celtic languages and culture were dominant. In the aftermath of the Famine many Irish families avoided passing on the use of Irish to their children in order to make sure that they identified with English language and culture. By the turn of the 19th century Cornish had ceased to be a community language, and the same fate befell Manx in the 20th century

(although today, thanks to a heroic revival effort, both languages again have native speakers).

However, even as economic and political circumstances caused native Celtic communities to decline, international scholarship began to take an interest in Celtic culture. The contents of mediaeval Irish and Welsh manuscripts were studied and published by people like Eoghan O'Curry, Whitley Stokes and Lady Charlotte Guest. J. F. Campbell and Alexander Carmichael researched ancient native traditions still surviving in the Scottish Highlands. François-Marie Luzel (Fañch an Uhel) did the same in Brittany. Translations of this material gave the general reading public a sense that there was something exciting and valuable about the Celtic heritage. It also restored a measure of self-respect to Celtic communities themselves, making some people have second thoughts about assimilating completely into the English – or French-speaking worlds. In the latter half of the 19th century this translated into organized movements that sought to restore the languages in areas that had abandoned their use and to win back the political freedom of Celtic nations. One of the most notable of these institutions was the Gaelic League, created in 1893 to win Irish people back to their native culture through a program of lectures and language classes. Douglas Hyde, the League's founder and mastermind, saw this as a cultural project with long-term political goals: it would gradually "de-Anglicise" Ireland to the point that the cultural separation would lead inexorably to a political separation. But the movement for political separation gathered momentum more quickly than Hyde had anticipated, leading to independence for twenty-six counties of Ireland without a real transition back to the native culture.

Nevertheless, the struggle of Celtic communities to reassert their autonomy and preserve their culture has continued unabated throughout this past century. Since, of the six Celtic nations, only Ireland has achieved even partial independence, all face a certain amount of resistance from centralized government agencies that either ignore their culture or are actively hostile to it. Yet the past thirty years have seen some erosion in modern states' anti-pluralist ideology, allowing more and more of a presence for the Celtic languages in education, publishing and the media. Periodicals appear regularly in all six languages, and all six are represented in the mass media of their countries to varying degrees. Pressure from Celtic-speakers in alliance with speakers of other minority languages has earned the Celtic languages official status as "Lesser-Used Languages" within the European Union, which has in turn pressured its member states to give more of a public role to these languages in the

communities where they are spoken. Edward Lhuyd's "Celtic" concept had become widely known by the 19th century, so that many people developed an interest in the common roots of the six modern cultures and saw this original unity as a source of strength. As a result, pan-Celtic organizations like the Pan-Celtic Congress and the Celtic League have served to open and maintain links between all the surviving Celtic communities, helping them learn from each other's struggles and reinforce each other's efforts. Some of these efforts have begun to bear fruit at the political level, as became evident in 1997 when a referendum allowed the Scots to re-establish their Parliament, and the Welsh to obtain a National Assembly. Also, descendants of Celtic immigrants around the world are rediscovering the value of their ancestral heritage and providing assistance to the cultural movements in Celtic countries. The greatest danger now, however, lies in the deadly effect of the Anglo-American commercial mass media, which tend to crush out of existence any cultures that aren't supported by strong, autonomous institutions.

Those of us who are involved with [CR] as a religious and spiritual project could be of great assistance to this ongoing renewal of the Celtic world. Modern Celts are often ambivalent about their ancient, pre-Christian past, because it has so often been distorted and misappropriated by outsiders. As long as we don't fall into this same trap of using the Celtic world as a canvas on which to project completely foreign fantasies and desires, and as long as we maintain a true respect for the living essence of Celtic tradition, our appreciation of the value and viability of the ancient root heritage of all the Celts can give more self-assurance to Celtic communities and ensure that the Celtic tradition endures as a living force into the future.

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QUESTIONS

1. Identify the following and place them in historical context:
    - ❖ Gráinne Ní Mháille
    - ❖ Eoin MacNeill
    - ❖ Arthur Griffith
    - ❖ Alasdair Mac Colla
    - ❖ Aneurin Bevan
    - ❖ James Graham of Montrose
    - ❖ The "Bonedo -Ruz"
    - ❖ Richard Trevithick

- Yann-Vari Perrot
- O'Donovan-Rossa
- James Keir Hardie
- Michael Davitt
- Saunders Lewis
- John MacLean
- Terence MacSwiney
- Iolo Morganwg
- "Illiam Dhone"
- Gwynfor Evans
- The "Whiteboys"
- Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg
- Roparz Hemon

2. Date and describe the significance of the following events:
    - The Battle of Prestonpans
    - The Betrayal of the Blue Books
    - The Battle of Aughrim
    - The Flight of the Earls
    - The Le Mans massacre
    - The "Tynghed yr Iaith" Address
    - The Plogoff protests
    - The drowning of Tryweryn
    - The "Prayer Book" Rebellion
3. What is the Gwladfa?
4. Imagine the case of an emigrant from each one of the six Celtic countries at some point in the nineteenth century. What would have been the most likely cause of emigration in each case? What would have been the most likely destination of each emigrant? What kind of livelihood would they have found in their new homes? And, in each case, what aspects of their culture would they have been most likely to discard, and why? What aspects, if any, might they have retained?
5. Who were the Madogwys? What was their impact on the cultural history of the relevant Celtic nation?

6. Imagine you were a Catholic Highlander in the middle of the 17th century. What would have been your political and cultural options?
7. Compare the United Irishmen of the time of Archibald Wolfe Tone with the Young Irelanders of the mid-19th century. Is there a difference in their respective connections to Celtic Ireland?
8. What did the French government do to the Breton cultural establishment at the end of World War II?
9. Examine the language-revival movements in each one of the six Celtic nations. When and by whom were they first launched? What kind of response did each one of them get? Evaluate their achievements to the present day.

# Community Lore: the Memory of Places

So far we've been surveying the history of the Celtic world through the kind of evidence professional historians use to present an image of the past that is as objectively reliable as possible. If we wish to understand the experience of Celtic communities in just such objectively reliable terms, we need to use these methods of investigation. However, we should also realize that traditional Celtic communities themselves have approached the memory of their collective past in a very different way, and for different purposes. In so far as we wish to gain a "native" perspective on Celtic tradition, seeing it from the inside rather than as outside observers, we should familiarize ourselves with the specifically Celtic ways of gathering and transmitting lore.

Traditional Celtic communities have always seen the present order of their lives as founded on a solid base of past experience. Virtually every institutionalized custom – whether it relates to seasonal rituals, inheritance laws, hierarchical privilege, conflict resolution, or any other kind of social interaction – is justified by a precedent: some event or decision in the past revealed the right course of action in a particular circumstance and continues to be regarded as the authority behind prescribed actions in the present. In order to maintain a coherent sense of the collective legitimacy of present customs, knowledge of all of these precedents has to be passed down in a systematic way. Because this body of knowledge is so huge, its transmission must be entrusted to "experts" whose memory is specially trained to deal with large amounts of information, and who devise their own methods for classifying the information so that it is easier to come to grips with it. In Old Irish this all-encompassing lore of the past was called *senchus* or *senchas* (modern Irish *seanchas*; modern Scots Gaelic *seanachas*) – "talk of old things". The loremaster whose task it was to remember the lore and make it available when needed was called a *senchae* or *senchaid* (modern Irish *seancha*‘; modern Scots Gaelic *seanachaidh*). [The closest corresponding term to *senchas* in the Brythonic languages is Breton *hengoun*, literally "ancient memory"; the other Brythonic words for "lore" – Welsh *llên*, Cornish *lyenn* (although Cornish now also has *hengov*, patterned after Breton *hengoun*) – come from Latin legendum "that which must be read", whence we also get English "legend".]

Many aspects of lore that modern Western scholarship would tend to see as unrelated –

such as genealogy, law, and mythology – have always been seen as coinhering parts of *senchas*. All past events have both legal and spiritual repercussions; what the gods did in the remote past is as relevant to the present state of things as what ordinary humans did a generation ago. In Irish-speaking communities until very recently (when mass media disrupted traditional forms of socializing) a *seancha´* was expected to know not only the past events that affected his community, but also the mythological narratives related to the seasonal cycle, which he would recite when it was ritually appropriate to do so. All of the past was a coherent whole, whose richness supported the present.

Much of lore was devoted to a legal purpose, providing precedents for adjudication of interpersonal conflicts. This body of lore became so voluminous that it acquired its own specialists, which in early Ireland were called *breithem*, pl. *breitheman* (modern Irish and Scots Gaelic *breitheamh*, Manx *briw*) – the term usually Anglicised as "brehon". In the modern languages the word has come to mean "judge", but under the traditional system brehons didn't pass judgment themselves: they served as advisors to those (usually land-rulers) who were empowered to act as judges, providing them with as much information as possible on precedents involving a given type of legal case. Supported by such expert information, the adjudicator could feel confident in his ability to come to a decision that would be accepted as righteous by the whole community. During the Middle Ages many compilations of legal lore were put into writing: the most extensive of these, the Irish *Senchas Már* ("Great Lore"), contains material that may be as old as 6th-century.

To facilitate memorization of lore at a time when writing down matters of sacred importance was considered inappropriate, various mnemonic devices came into use. One of the most common was to put the lore into verse form, so that the patterns of meter and alliteration would make the material easier to remember and recite. Another was to treat the landscape as a kind of "talking book", associating each feature of it with an event that was said to have taken place there, so that merely looking at the spot would conjure up a story, or a verse describing the event. In early Ireland this led to the development of a specialized body of lore called *dindshenchas* (modern Irish *dinnsheanchas*), the "lore of places". Much of this lore was eventually written down in mediaeval manuscript compilations; much more continued to be passed down orally in traditional communities. The lore of places also reinforced the bond between Celtic communities and the land they lived on, linking it imaginatively with that past in which all people had their most intimate roots.

This idea of all aspects of past tradition being integrated as a whole, with no tight boundaries between them (even when areas of specialization are recognized), is important to maintaining a native Celtic world-view. Whether we live in an area which has a long association with Celtic culture, or one where the Celtic presence is very new, it behooves us to develop a sense of lore that links the experience of people to place through time.

QUESTIONS

1. In what way do your immediate surroundings reflect your traditions? What kind of link do you see between the landscape of the place where you live and your roots as a cultural being? Do certain buildings or natural features that you see on an everyday basis suggest meaningful stories to you that define your cultural past? If yes, examine a few such stories. How do you think you might go about making the relations between them richer and more consistent?

# Track Two: Language

# GAEILGE - IRISH

It is thought that Celtic speech rooted itself in Ireland at a very early stage, probably at the end of the Bronze Age, ca. 900 BCE. From the late Neolithic a brilliant native culture had flourished in the area (extending across Ireland, Britain, and the Atlantic seaboard of the Continent), and it is likely that it was in the context of this culture that a distinctive form of Celtic developed, which linguists have called "Goidelic". Other forms of Celtic eventually became dominant in Britain and Armorica, but Goidelic remained the main language of Ireland. Although we have no textual examples of Goidelic from ancient times, we can get an idea of what it was like from the Irish place-names listed in Ptolemy's Atlas, and from the ogham inscriptions found in Ireland and western parts of Britain, mostly dating from the 3rd century CE and a little later. These scanty sources suggest a language still very close to Old Celtic, with fully inflected nouns and verbs.

Although Ireland was never conquered by the Romans (the only part of the Celtic world to evade such conquest), it had regular contacts with the Roman world and its culture, especially by way of Roman-occupied Britain, where many Irish people lived and traded during the last centuries of the Roman Empire. One of the cultural items Ireland imported from the Roman world was Christianity, a religion based on a sacred scripture. Since a full knowledge of the authoritative sources for the new religion required literacy, the ability to use the Latin alphabet became a necessity for the new learned elite studying and teaching in the network of monasteries that began to flourish throughout the Celtic world in the late 5th century, and that quickly became the dominant cultural institution in Ireland. At first the only language written and read by monastics was Latin itself, but soon the Latin alphabet was adapted to represent the sounds of the native language of Ireland. Some of the earliest examples of Irish written in the new script are glosses added to religious manuscripts in Latin, clarifying difficult terms for Irish-speakers.

The form of Irish that appears in these texts is called Old Irish (Sean-Ghaeilge), and as a written standard it was used roughly from 700 to 950. During this period many of the great themes of later Irish literary tradition were first elaborated. Through a fusion of the Christian and pre-Christian educated elites much of the ancient lore that had been passed down by the druidic/bardic schools was adapted to reflect a new social and cultural reality. The

earliest versions of the epic *Táin Bó Cualnge*, the earliest recorded stories about Fionn Mac Cumhail, and the first compilations of what would become the new syncretistic history of Ireland, the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* appear around this time. There is also a body of remarkable nature poetry. Old Irish is characterized by an extremely complex verbal inflection system; its nouns have three grammatical genders (masculine, feminine, and neuter) and five cases.

After 950 the written standard begins to change in the direction of greater simplicity – probably reflecting changes in colloquial speech. This stage of the language is called Middle Irish (Meán-Ghaeilge). Most of the great manuscript collections of mediaeval Ireland were compiled during this period – increasingly the work of secular literary professionals, since the monasteries ceased to be repositories of native learning after the 11th-12th centuries. Some of the texts included in these compilations are clearly much older than the manuscripts themselves, and in some cases Middle Irish "updatings" have been added to them. The rules for the syllabic poetry (*dán díreach*) composed by professional poets also become established by this time.

Around 1350 the language can be said to become Modern Irish (Nua-Ghaeilge). The neuter gender disappeared, and the verbal inflection system was drastically simplified. As Irish society was brought into the feudal system dominated by an Anglo-Norman upper class, new Continental influences were brought to bear on Irish-language literature, making their appearance in poetry and prose alike. Many of the mythological tales that had been circulating in older versions were given a new form more in tune with the changes that were taking place in the social and cultural climate, focusing on their entertaining qualities rather than on their historical value. Many of the stories about the Fianna – once considered a "lower class" body of mythology – were first given literary treatment around this time. Professional poets continued to praise land-rulers – although those rulers were for the most part no longer of Gaelic stock – using traditional forms learned in bardic schools.

This world began to collapse when, in the latter part of the 16th century, the English state attempted to consolidate its political power over Ireland by bringing in large numbers of English-speaking settlers to contest and suppress the social and cultural standing of the natives. Throughout the 17th century, despite the tense political situation, Irish remained a prestigious literary language, producing masterpieces like Seathrún Céitinn's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*; but after 1695, with the imposition of penal laws on Roman Catholics, English began to gain the upper hand. With the exile or extermination of the educated Irish-speaking upper

class, the professional poets no longer had any patrons to support them or any sophisticated audience to appreciate their craft, and those who continued to study in the dwindling bardic schools were forced to abandon the complex forms of *dán díreach* and adapt to the cruder (in their eyes) accented metres of *amhránaíocht*, characteristic of folksong. By the middle of the 18th century this process was complete. Irish underwent a rapid decline. Even so, a vigorous poetic tradition continued to flourish in certain areas: the poets produced *aislingí* (vision-poems) where Ireland was personified as an ill-treated woman, or contemporary satire like Brian Merriman's *Cúirt an Mheáin Oíche*.

Although Irish remained the primary language of most of the population of Ireland until the second half of the 19th century, in the absence of formal education in the language a majority of Irish-speakers were no longer able to read or write it. Pockets of Irish literacy remained, especially in Munster; but by and large people were ignorant of the sophisticated literary standard used in 17th century writing and knew only their local vernaculars. The Famine of the late 1840's, which had a particularly severe impact on poorer Irish-speaking areas, further weakened the community standing of the language. However, several of the movements working for the political emancipation of Ireland during the 19th century came to recognize the importance of the language for Irish identity, and soon organizations appeared that promoted the speaking of Irish and encouraged the Anglicized middle class to learn it anew. The founding of the Gaelic League (Conradh na Gaeilge) in 1893 represented the culmination of this process. At first an attempt was made to revive the 17th-century literary language, then to make a nationwide standard of the living dialect of Munster, as the most conservative one and closest to the classical norm. Neither of these approaches were successful in the long run, and the forms of the language actually spoken in the various *Gaeltachtaí* (Irish-speaking areas) became the basis for what was taught.

As the struggle for Irish independence achieved many of its goals in the course of the 20th century, the Irish language regained some measure of official status and government support. Irish was made a compulsory subject in school (and an Irish proficiency exam was made a prerequisite for coveted civil-service positions), so that practically the entire population of the country was exposed to the language and acquired at least a smattering of it. Unfortunately, this didn't lead to widespread fluency in Irish, much less its re-instatement as the common spoken language throughout Ireland. Middle-class hostility to Irish, strongly established in the 19th century, hasn't been completely reversed; and the position of Irish as

a community language remains precarious.

In spite of this, Irish-language literature has had a glorious renaissance in the 20th century, and is still flourishing today. Poetry, novels, short stories, plays, journalism, academic writing – the full range of literary creativity has been represented, and will amply repay the efforts of anyone who learns the language in order to become acquainted with them.

Irish today is spoken in three main dialects:

– Munster Irish (Gaeilge na Mumhan, Gaelainn). This is the community language of Corca Dhuibhne on the Dingle peninsula of West Kerry, but it is also spoken by scattered individuals and families in other parts of Kerry, West Cork, and the Ring peninsula of Waterford.

– Connaught Irish (Gaeilge Chonnachta). This is spoken in Connemara (Co. Galway and southern Co. Mayo) and the Aran Islands.

– Ulster Irish (Gaeilge Ulaidh). This is spoken in parts of Donegal (Tír Chonaill), especially around Gaoth Dobhair. Although this is a small Gaeltacht, it remains lively and vigorous. This is also the dialect learned by revivalists in nationalist communities in the Six Counties of Northern Ireland.

Each of these dialects presents marked particularisms in pronunciation, grammar, and idioms, but the three are mutually intelligible. Any one of them is appropriate as a beginning point for studying the Irish language. The government has created a *caighdeán oifigiúil* (Official Standard) – mostly based on Connaught Irish but incorporating a few features of the other two dialects – for use in its publications, in the school system, and in the general media, but by and large native speakers remain faithful to their local dialects. Ca. 1950 a major change was introduced into the spelling of Irish, eliminating many "silent" letters; around that time also the Gaelic type that had come into use at the beginning of the revival was, for economic reasons, replaced by ordinary Roman type. Irish orthography remains almost completely phonetic, which is a great help in learning the language.

# KERNEWEK - CORNISH

Although it appears to have been named after the Cornouii (whose territory, in historical times, was actually centered on far-away Wroxeter), at the time of the Roman occupation

Cornwall (and the rest of the southwestern British peninsula) was under the rule of the Dumnonii. Migration from the Dumnonian territory to Armorica on the Continent played a major role in the formation of Brittany as a linguistic and cultural entity. The collapse of Roman rule in Britain and the increasing encroachment of the English, beginning in the mid-5th century, eventually led to the Dumnonian territory being separated from the rest of Britain when the English reached the mouth of the Severn in 577. The English continued to attack the lands of the "West-Welsh" (as they called the Dumnonii), eventually placing the border between English and British-Celtic realms at the river Tamar in 936, thus creating the historical entity of Cornwall. Cornish autonomy under English suzerainty continued to be respected for a number of centuries, although little by little the region was merged administratively with England.

Despite this, the linguistic and cultural uniqueness of Cornwall remained evident throughout the Middle Ages. The earliest records of the language (glosses in Latin manuscripts, mostly from the 10th century) suggest that there was little difference in speech at first between the various Brythonic-speaking areas in Britain and Armorica. As the Middle Ages progressed, however, increasing discrepancies appeared between the speech of Wales on the one hand and that of Cornwall and Brittany on the other. Our most extensive document on Old Cornish (Kernewek Koth) is the "Cottonian Vocabulary" or *Vocabularium cornicum*, a 12th-century Cornish-Latin glossary. Many of the stories that became part of the Arthurian mythos (like that of Tristan and Isold) certainly originated in Cornwall and may have been given written form in Kernewek, but unfortunately no such manuscripts have survived.

As there continued to be frequent contacts between the Celts on both sides of the Channel, a certain cultural cohesion was maintained between Cornwall and Brittany, so that Kernewek and Brezhoneg remained mutually intelligible to a large degree until the end of the Middle Ages. This allowed Cornish visitors to participate in the great religious festivals of Brittany, and to enjoy the vernacular religious theatre that was a conspicuous feature of such events. During the 1400's and early 1500's miracle-plays of a similar nature were composed in Kernewek for performance during the liturgical year. The language of these plays is Middle Cornish (Kernewek Kres). They are rich in vocabulary and idiom and, taken together, form the bulk of the Cornish literary heritage (one of them, *Bywnans Ke*, was discovered as late as 2002!).

With the coming of the Protestant Reformation (which the Cornish at first strongly resisted), major changes were imposed on Cornish society, with grave consequences for native Cornish language and culture. Contacts with Catholic Brittany were curtailed, putting an end to the cultural reinforcement that had come from that quarter. English became the sole language of the social and intellectual elite (even so, English didn't seriously replace Kernewek as a community language until the later 1600's; in the late 1500's John Tregear thought it profitable to translate many of Bishop Bonner's sermons into Kernewek, so that ordinary Cornish congregations could understand them). By the 1700's the language was spoken only in the area of Penzance, where antiquarians like Nicholas Boson, William Gwavas, and others busily collected whatever they could glean from the last two generations of native speakers. This stage of the language is called Late Cornish (Kernewek Diwedhes). It is characterized by a breakdown of the old verbal inflection system and a syntax strongly influenced by English; the orthography used to write it down also owes a great deal to English phonetic spelling.

Most books state that the last native speaker of Cornish was Dolly Pentreath, who died in 1777. In fact, contemporary sources make it clear that there were other Cornish-speakers around at the time: for example, William Bodener, a fluent speaker from Mousehole, lived on until 1794. Today the consensus is that the last person to have some traditional knowledge of Kernewek was John Davey, who died in 1891.

Even so, the language refused to stay dead. The Cornish scholar William Jenner at first approached its study as an antiquarian subject, but then developed a personal bond with it, taught himself to speak it, and by 1900 was encouraging others to use it as an everyday language, expressive of Cornish ethnic identity. His efforts gained the attention and respect of the international pan-Celtic movement and found support at home.

For the first few decades the Cornish revival suffered from a lack of clear standards as far as spelling and grammar were concerned. But at the end of the 1920's Robert Morton Nance (one of Jenner's collaborators) proposed a new standard which he called Unified Cornish (Kernewek Unys), taking Middle Cornish (from the period when Kernewek last was a self-sufficient community language) as the basis for grammar and syntax, but adopting vocabulary and tips on pronunciation from all available sources. This proved very effective and was the form of the language several generations of Cornish-learners came to acquire.

Serviceable as it was, however, Unified Cornish was far from perfect: in particular, its

orthography failed to represent the native vowel system accurately. In the 1980's separate attempts at improving the situation led to the emergence of several competing standards: Ken George's Kernewek Kemmyn proposed a phonemic spelling system (one written symbol per phoneme); Richard Gendall, on the contrary, created a standard rigidly based on Late Cornish alone; Nicholas Williams' Revised Unified Cornish was a less radical modification of Nance's standard; and many people, of course, remained faithful to the Unified Cornish they had learned. At first this diversity of standards led to intensely hostile factionalism, which did great harm to the revival movement as a whole. Today, fortunately, passions have cooled and there is more tolerance for the diversity.

Many thousands of people have passed proficiency exams in Kernewek and have a working knowledge of it, but only a few hundred speak it fluently as an everyday language. Nevertheless, as Cornish-learners have passed the language on to their children (and encouraged them to use it among themselves through special play-groups like Dalleth) a generation of new native speakers is now nearing adulthood. In 2002 Kernewek was officially recognised by the UK government as a "Lesser-Used Language" under the EC charter, an event which will no doubt enhance the language's standing and appeal.

All the currently used standards of Kernewek are equally valid entry-points into the study of the language. For the purposes of this course, however, we strongly recommend that you begin with Kernewek Kemmyn – because it's the easiest to learn, is probably the most widespread at this time (having been adopted by both the Cornish Language Society and the Cornish Language Board), and is the medium of some particularly useful resources, like the monthly all-Cornish magazine *An Gannas*, which features organisational news, poetry, fiction, language scholarship, commentary on local and international politics, etc.

# GËIDHLIG - SCOTS GAELIC

Goidelic-speakers ("Scots") from northeastern Ireland began colonising the northwestern coast of Britain in the 5th-6th centuries CE, establishing their language and culture in the kingdom of Dálriada (present-day Argyll), the nucleus of what would become, after absorbing the surrounding Pictish and British-speaking states, the Kingdom of Scotland. For the first thousand years of Scottish history, Scotland and Ireland shared the same written

language – the standard that had been developed by the intellectual elite in Irish monasteries (Scottish scholars now often refer to it as "Old/Middle Common Gaelic" rather than "Old/Middle Irish"). Scottish particularisms in speech may have begun to appear at an early date, but they would not have been reflected in the literary language.

Although Gaelic was the official language of the Scottish court and administration in the early Middle Ages, it soon became marginalized. By the 12th century, increasing ethnic-English influence on the government (and an influx of English noble refugees in the Scottish Lowlands, fleeing the Norman invasion of England) brought the country within European feudal norms and made it look southward and across to the Continent for its cultural and political models, rather than to its native traditions. The quasi-independent Lordship of the Isles maintained a Gaelic-speaking entity in the west of Scotland until the end of the 14th century and beyond, but little by little it was forced back under the control of the centralized Scottish kingdom. A major cultural divide appeared between the Gaelic-speaking Highlands and the Lallans-(ie, dialectal-English) speaking Lowlands.

In the 16th century the Protestant Reformation, taking root in the Lowlands, brought about a decisive rift between the ruling classes of Scotland and the country's Gaelic past. Gaelic culture was identified with the rejected Catholic establishment, and vast numbers of Gaelic manuscripts were destroyed. As a result, almost nothing remains of the mediaeval Gaelic literature of Scotland. The one exception is the Book of the Dean of Lismore, which contains the work of poets from the 14th to the 16th centuries.

The breakdown in relations between Scotland and Ireland led to a divergence in Gaelic usage in the two countries. Instead of retaining the literary standard that 17th-century Irish writers used, Gaelic writers in the Highlands began to use the vernacular forms of the language as it was actually spoken in Scotland. Several generations of brilliant poets flourished in the 17th and especially the early 18th centuries, praising the chieftains of their clans and commenting on the tumultuous political situation of the time. Unfortunately, the situation resolved itself tragically for the Highlands and their culture: Scotland lost its independence in 1707, the Jacobite dream of restoring a Scotland where the Gaels would play a respected role was destroyed forever at Culloden in 1746, active persecution of Gaelic culture followed, and eventually even the clan chieftains turned on their own people, expropriating them from their lands to make room for large-scale sheep-farming projects. The Highland Clearances, as these events are now called, depopulated Gaelic-speaking areas

and further weakened the status of the language in Scotland. Many of the exiles went to Canada, where some of them continued to speak their native tongue, especially in Nova Scotia: a Gaelic-speaking community survives on Cape Breton; after a long decline, it is showing signs of revival.

Luckily, even as the traditionally Gaelic areas were being uprooted and much of their heritage was on the brink of being forgotten, two folklorists did much work to preserve it. Alexander Carmichael compiled *Ortha nan Gaidheal/Carmina Gadelica*, a collection of prayers and folk charms that retained a unique mixture of pre-Christian and Celtic Christian traits. J.F. Campbell gathered folktales – many of them mythological in nature, featuring the deeds of the Fianna – and published them as *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*.

By the end of the 19th century a reaction was setting in among educated Gaelic-speakers, who demanded a greater role for the language in both education and publishing. During the 20th century, despite a further shrinking of Gaelic communities, many of their efforts met with success, as Gaelic was taught in schools and new works were published by Gaelic-language presses. Gaelic literature has flourished over the last hundred years: in Sorley McLean (Somhairle Mac 'ill-Eathain) it has a poet of international standing. There is also a lively short-story tradition. Although the situation of the language remains precarious, native Gaelic-speakers are becoming more confident in their cultural identity – a telling sign of this is the creation of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Gaelic-medium business college on the isle of Skye.

In centuries past the prestige dialect of Gaelic was the dialect of Perthshire (e.g., in the Gaelic translation of the Bible), but with the disappearance of Gaelic from much of the Scottish mainland the dialect of Stornoway (Lewis) is probably closer to being the modern norm. Although Gaelic survives in some mainland areas like the Ardnamurchan peninsula, its speakers are now concentrated in the Outer Isles. There are two main dialect groups, each with its peculiarities of pronunciation and idiom: a northern one centered on Lewis and Harris; and a southern one centered on Skye, Barra and South Uist. Gaelic spelling (which is still based on Irish orthography) is essentially phonetic, which facilitates learning.

# GAILCK - MANX

Little is known about the language of the ancient inhabitants of the Isle of Man. The earliest onomastics of the island suggest that the population spoke a form of Gallo-Brittonic and may have been linked in some way with the Belgic Menapii of the North Sea coast. By the 4th century CE, however, Ogham inscriptions indicate that there was a Goidelic-speaking presence on the island; and subsequent records of native personal names (with a few exceptions) point to a Gaelic background, as the Isle of Man became an integral part of the monastic Celtic Christian network that spread from Ireland. No doubt Old Irish was the language of the educated elite on Man as it was elsewhere in the Gaelic world but, as the island passed under the rule of Norse – and then of Scottish and English – rulers, its native culture was eclipsed, and no Manx vernacular literature has survived from the Middle Ages. The modern form of the Manx language is thought to have emerged around the 14th century, at the same time as Modern Irish and Modern Scots Gaelic.

The first written Manx appeared during the 17th and especially the 18th century. By that time, however, because of the break in contact with literate Gaelic-speaking culture in Ireland and Scotland, there no longer was any awareness of Irish orthography, and so a new writing system was invented from scratch, based to a large degree (though not entirely) on English phonetic spelling. This gives written Manx a very different look from that of Irish and Scots Gaelic, although in other respects the languages aren't that far apart. For example, compare the phrase "Are you well?" in all three Gaelic languages:

Gaeilge: *An bhfuil tœ go maith?*
Gaidhlig: *A bheil thu gu math?*
Gailck: *Vel oo dy mie*?

By far the largest repository of written Manx available to us is the Manx translation of the Bible, which was published in 1775, and which is still the primary source of information on (and model for) written Manx style today. By the end of the 18th century the educated elite of the island was strongly in favor of English and looked down on native culture, and in the course of the 19th century the local importance of the Manx language dwindled as fewer and fewer people passed it on to the next generation, until, in the first half of the 20th century, only a handful of native speakers remained. The last of these native speakers (Ned Maddrell) died in 1974; but by that time a revival was in progress and a considerable number

of people had learned it as a second language. Yn Çheshaght Ghailckagh was founded in 1899 (in imitation of Conradh na Gaeilge in Ireland and An Comunn Gàidhealach in Scotland) to preserve the Manx language by teaching it and encouraging its use and has remained active in that field to this very day. The last decade has seen many encouraging signs, such as the island government – after over a century of hostility or indifference – giving the language some official recognition, and an increasing number of children acquiring Manx as their native tongue.

As has been suggested above, the Manx literary heritage is not very extensive. It consists mostly of folk ballads, carols (*carvalyn*), and folktales collected during the 19th century. Original literary composition was encouraged by Yn Çheshaght Ghailckagh (especially under the leadership of Mona Douglas). In recent years poets with impressive and promising talent have emerged, such as Robert Corteen Carswell.

An excellent website giving comprehensive access to Manx-related materials, including language lessons, reference grammar, online dictionary, texts, and relevant links is: http://homepages.enterprise.net/kelly/ .[1]

# BREZHONEG - BRETON

Starting around the 3rd century CE, settlers from the island of Britain began establishing themselves on the Armorican peninsula of Gaul. When the English began occupying Britain in the 5th century, larger numbers of refugees crossed the Channel, most of them from the territory of the Dumnonii (which would later become Cornwall and Devon). Before long the political influence of the immigrants had become so dominant that the region came to be known as *Brettia* (the name which later evolved into *Breizh*), "the Land of the Britons". This was the origin of the historical nation of Brittany.

There has long been some controversy over whether the language of Brittany – Brezhoneg – is descended primarily from the speech of the British immigrants or from that of the Armorican natives. Much speculation has attached itself in particular to the southeastern Gwenedeg dialect, which differs markedly from the other dialects in pronunciation, and to a lesser extent in vocabulary. It has been suggested that Gwenedeg, at least, is descended

[1] Working snapshots of this website can be found on the Wayback Machine, from about Sep. 2006 and previous.

from Gaulish, whence its peculiarities. Today most scholars agree that the sources of Breton are overwhelmingly British, and that the divergent vocabulary of Gwenedeg is due to its origins in a community of immigrants who came from South Wales rather than from Dumnonia, with its odd pronunciation resulting from a greater influence of the speech-patterns of the native Gallo-Roman population than was the case elsewhere. There remains some discussion, however, about the precise amount of influence Gaulish had on the development of Brezhoneg.

Old Breton (Henvrezhoneg) is attested from early glosses in Latin church manuscripts. Although it was coveted by both France and England, Brittany maintained its independence as a sovereign duchy throughout the Middle Ages. It evidently had a flourishing literary tradition, and it was mostly through Breton channels that the Arthurian legends found their way into the non-Celtic literatures of Europe. Some of this material at least must have been given written form in Brittany itself. Marie de France's *Lais*, written in Norman French but openly based on existing Breton models, give us an idea of at least some of the *content* of the Breton literature of her time. Unfortunately, no original Breton manuscripts have survived from that period.

Breton texts begin to appear with greater frequency from the 15th century on. The stage of the language here is Middle Breton (Krennvrezhoneg), which lasts until the mid-17th century. Much of the material consists of religious theatre, as well as glossaries and instructional texts.

The military defeat of Brittany by France in 1488, followed by a union of crowns and finally by formal annexation in 1536, led to a decline in the prestige of the Breton language, and to its disappearance from all official contexts. However, even though the educated elite abandoned Breton for French, the vast majority of the rural population remained monoglot Breton-speakers until the mid-20th century. These communities continued to transmit an extremely rich folk tradition with ancient roots.

After the 17th century Brezhoneg becomes Modern Breton, in fact a group of distinct dialects. When it was written at all during the 18th and early 19th centuries, it was in an *ad hoc* orthography inspired by French phonetics, reflecting the idiosyncrasies of the particular dialect being used. Most of the material was, as it had been during the previous centuries, religious and inspirational in content. The *Buhez ar Sent* (Lives of the Saints), first published in 1752 in the dialect of Bro-Leon and later updated and translated into other dialects,

became a mainstay of pious Breton families who made reading it together into a ritual, and it sustained Breton literacy for generations in some traditional communities.

Although Brittany lost its last vestige of political autonomy when the Breton Parliament was abolished in 1788, the sense of Breton national identity remained strong, especially among educated Breton expatriates in Paris. One of them, Jean-François Le Gonidec, worked assiduously until his death in 1838 at compiling dictionaries of the Breton language, proposing a new spelling system better suited to its native phonetic structure. This has remained the basis for all later orthographic usage in Breton. One of Le Gonidec's colleagues, Philippe Hersart de la Villemarqué (Kervarker), produced what he called the *Barzaz-Breiz* (Bardic Lore of Brittany), which he claimed to be a compilation of oral folk ballads he had collected in the field, reflecting the entire history of Brittany from the days of the Druids to the time of the French Revolution. How much of it really did have a traditional basis and how much was purely his own invention is a matter that has never been settled, but at the time, with its evocation of exotic ancient lore, it appealed powerfully to the romantic imagination of his contemporaries and gained new adherents to the cause of the Breton language; it can be said to be the first work of modern Breton literature. It also inspired the work of François Luzel (Fañch an Uhel), who collected and published the rich oral folklore of the Breton countryside, in an effort equivalent to Alexander Carmichael's and J.F. Campbell's work in Scotland.

The Breton revival in the second half of the 19th century is called the First Emsav (Rising). Because Breton communities often felt that they were defending their local (often religious) traditions against the intrusive, secularizing and centralizing influence of the French State, this stage of the revival often had a conservative Catholic flavor and numbered many clerics among its leaders. The first major Breton novelist, Lan Inizan, linked Breton identity to revolt against the "atheist" French establishment. Other important figures of the First Emsav are the powerfully gifted poet Yann-Ber Kalloc'h, who died in World War I, and Tangi Malmanche, whose verse-plays bridged the gap between traditional Breton religious theatre and the modern stage.

The period between the two world wars was one of ebullient activity and innovation in the Breton revival. This is referred to as the Second Emsav. It was dominated by the influence of the cultural periodical *Gwalarn* and of its editor, Roparz Hemon, an amazingly prolific writer who used Breton in every conceivable literary genre. He sought to turn his back on the

conservative bias of the First Emsav and to open Breton culture to an awareness of international modern trends, and especially to what was happening in other Celtic countries. The Second Emsav was also linked to the greater political militancy of new nationalist movements like Breiz Atao. Other important writers of this period include Jakez Riou, author of several popular plays and of the exquisite short stories collected as *Geotenn ar Werc'hez* (The Virgin's Grass); the novelist Youenn Drezenn; the poets Aberhel and Maodez Glanndour (whose influence would extend to the post-World War II era); the artist and fantasist Langleiz (Xavier de Langlais); and many others.

World War II proved disastrous for the Breton movement. On the pretext that a handful of Breton nationalists had chosen to collaborate with the Germans against French authorities, at the close of the war the French government embarked on a campaign of vicious persecution of all things relating to Breton identity. The psychological effect this had was to make Breton-speakers ashamed of their own culture and reluctant to pass their language on to their children, exactly as had happened with Irish-speakers a century before.

In spite of all that, by the '50's a Third Emsav was under way. It began with the launching of the periodical *Al Liamm* (The Link), which became a kind of successor to *Gwalarn*, and is still being published. The rediscovery of Breton folk music as a medium of community celebration and social commentary also played a major role. The great upheaval that France went through in 1968 enabled the Breton movement (and other minority cultural movements) to tap the general anti-authoritarian mood of the day in order to gain more visibility. Today, despite some hopeful developments (notably the creation of Diwan, a separate school system that teaches through the medium of Brezhoneg), the future of the language remains precarious, as the French political establishment is strongly opposed to its survival. The most dangerous threat to regional cultures at present is the amended Article 2 of the French Constitution, which states that French is the only official language of the Republic and that French is to be the sole medium of education (although this measure was introduced with the intention of defending French against English, it is being used as a weapon against regional languages). Campaigns to eliminate this wording in the Constitution are thus of crucial importance.

Despite the continued opposition from official circles, attitudes towards Breton in Brittany are more positive now than they have been in a long time. There are quite a few Breton-language periodicals, reflecting a variety of cultural and political positions. Some

commercial establishments are making an effort to promote the language. There are too many writers active in the Third Emsav for us to give a comprehensive list of them here, but one should mention the novelist Per Denez; the poet Youenn Gwernig and the poet and essayist Reun ar C'halan, both of whom owe something of their internationalist perspective to the many years they spent in the U.S.; and the prose writer Yann Gerven, whose stories are enlivened by a truly outrageous inventiveness, lots of humour, and a language rich with colloquial idioms.

There are four main dialects of spoken Brezhoneg today: those of Kerne, Leon, Treger, and Gwened. The first three have much in common and are often referred together by the acronym KLT; whereas Gwenedeg, as mentioned earlier, is very different – so much so that for centuries it was impossible to use the same spelling system for Gwenedeg as for the other dialects. The problem was solved during the Second Emsav through the creation of what has been variously called *zedacheg*, the 'ZH' spelling, or the "University" spelling. Since one of the main differences setting Gwenedeg apart is that it has an 'h' sound in many words that have a z' sound in KLT, the solution was to represent that sound as 'zh' (the native name of Brittany, for example, is pronounced 'Breiz' in KLT and 'Breih' in Gwenedeg – but both pronunciations can be represented by the spelling *Breizh*). Although alternative spelling systems still exist – the publisher *Brud Nevez* continues to use an older orthography suited to the Leon dialect, and some Gwenedeg writers prefer spellings more closely wedded to their own speech – the "University" spelling is now the one overwhelmingly favored by Breton-users.

# CYMRAEG - WELSH

It is not known exactly when speakers of the Gallo-Brittonic form of Celtic first established themselves in Britain, but it must have been during the Iron Age, no earlier than ca. 600 BCE and no later than ca. 200 BCE. Both Britain and Ireland had, since the Late Neolithic, been a part of a flourishing "Atlantic" culture, where a variety of Celtic and pre-Celtic languages had no doubt been spoken. By the time Greek and Roman sources provide us with information on British personal and place names, the language they reflect seems little different from the Gaulish spoken by the Celts of the Continent, which is why it is

generally referred to nowadays as "Gallo-Brittonic". Since the same Classical sources indicate that it was from the northern Celtic peoples known collectively as the Belgae that the latest and most influential settlers of Britain had come, it appears that the Belgic dialect came to predominate on the island and served as the basis for the later development of the Brythonic, or British Celtic, languages.

The Roman conquest of most of Britain in the first century CE established Latin as the language of administration and of all official business in urbanized areas, but British remained the spoken language of the countryside and of the independent tribal areas in the far north. When Roman rule collapsed in the mid-5th century and English settlers from across the North Sea took over much of the island, it was the most heavily Romanized areas in the east and the midlands that succumbed first, and native British chieftains from areas outside direct Roman control were able to consolidate their power in the north and the west. The language they used was British, not Latin; even so, their speech had adopted a large amount of Latin vocabulary from the centuries of Roman occupation, and this has remained as part of the heritage of the Brythonic languages.

By the 6th century British shows signs of developing in the direction of Welsh as we know it, but our main records of Old Welsh (Hen Gymraeg) come from the period between the 9th and the 11th centuries. The oldest ones are glosses on Latin religious manuscripts, but there was also a flourishing poetic tradition, much of it relating to parts of Britain far outside the present-day borders of Wales. The *Gododdin*, attributed to the bard Aneirin, describes a doomed raid by British Celtic tribesmen from the region of modern Edinburgh on the territories of their English enemies in Northumbria. Taliesin, the poet about whom a rich mythological tradition would later develop, praised and mourned his patron Urien the ruler of Rheged, a kingdom straddling what is now the border between Scotland and England. A strikingly beautiful cycle of poems is traditionally attributed (although the form of the language in fact belongs to a later period) to the 7th-century princess Heledd, mourning the death of her brother Cynddylan the ruler of Pengwern, in what would later become Shropshire, after it was overrun by the English. In Welsh literary history these poets are usually referred to as the *Cynfeirdd* or "Proto-Bards".

From the end of the 11th century to the end of the 14th century the form of the language is called Middle Welsh (Cymraeg Canol). This is an extremely rich and creative period for Welsh literature. Native rulers (and, a little later, Norman overlords) received praise

from formally trained, professional poets. They are known in Cymraeg as the *Gogynfeirdd*. Their work is very difficult to interpret, as it is less concerned with conveying a linear meaning than with creating impressions through sound-painting. Other, more accessible poems have been preserved from this period as well; and this was also the golden age of the *cyfarwyddiaid*, or professional storytellers, who (together with their counterparts in Cornwall and Brittany) played a major role in developing the stories that would become famous internationally as the Matter of Britain (or the Arthurian mythos), recycling ancient mythological themes as mediaeval entertainment. Eleven of these tales, preserved in the manuscript collections called the White Book of Rhydderch and the Red Book of Hergest, were published together in the 19th century by Lady Charlotte Guest under the title *The Mabinogion*, and are still counted among the classics of world literature. They are only the tip of the iceberg, however, a small part of a rich narrative tradition that is now mostly lost. The *Trioedd Ynys Prydein* (Triads of the Isle of Britain), a work from the same period that was intended to serve as a mnemonic aid for *cyfarwyddiaid* by grouping stories in triads according to salient narrative features, contains references to many stories that are otherwise unknown to us.

After the violent end of native rule in 1285, a slow cultural shift occurred throughout Wales. Cymraeg remained the everyday language of the country, and native poets continued to praise the nobility according to traditional custom, but the mysterious intricacies of the art of the *Gogynfeirdd* became less and less appropriate for an upper class with increasingly foreign connections. In the course of the 14th and 15th centuries poets adapted their styles to the new cultural climate, importing forms and subject-matter from other European traditions while retaining and expanding the complex native approach to alliteration, or *cynghanedd*. These poets are known collectively as *Beirdd yr Uchelwyr* (Poets of the Nobility). Dafydd ap Gwilym (ca. 1320-ca. 1380), perhaps the greatest Welsh poet and the greatest European poet of the 14th century, was something of a "hinge" figure, whose writings show the transition from Middle Welsh to Modern Welsh (Cymraeg Cyfoes).

The rise of the Welsh-descended Tudor dynasty to the English throne at the end of the 15th century didn't lead to a higher status for Welsh language and culture. On the contrary, the Tudors identified strongly with English as the sole language of a centralized state, and in 1532 merged Wales with England administratively, stripping the Welsh language of all official status. However, in their zeal for promoting the Protestant Reformation (which the

Welsh at first strongly resisted), the Tudor government sponsored the translation of the Bible into Welsh: published in 1588, the Morgan Bible had an impact on the Welsh language comparable to that of the King James Bible on English. It helped create a pattern for writing in modern Welsh – which also received some impetus from the work of Elizabethan Welsh "humanists" like William Salesbury. The masterworks composed in Cymraeg over the next century and a half include Morgan Llwyd's *Llyfr y Tri Aderyn* (The Book of the Three Birds) and Ellis Wynne's *Gweledigaetheu y Bardd Cwsc* (The Visions of the Sleeping Bard).

Towards the middle of the 18th century Bible-based literacy in Welsh helped in the spread of the Methodist revival movement through the medium of Cymraeg. Poets like Ann Griffith and William Williams Pantycelyn composed hymns that have remained a beloved part of the Welsh heritage to this day. The revival also established a Welsh-speaking "chapel culture" that dominated rural Wales until the second half of the 20th century.

By the end of the 1700's there were enough prosperous Welsh-speaking tradesmen both inside and outside Wales to bring about the emergence of a Welsh-speaking middle class. As a rule, these people were interested in their native heritage and sponsored the publication of early literary texts and documents in Cymraeg, especially under the auspices of fraternities like the Cymmrodorion and the Gwyneddigion. It was at this time that an erudite stonecutter from Glamorgan, Edward Williams (who took the bardic name Iolo Morganwg – "Eddie from Glamorgan" –, by which he is far better known), got involved in the antiquarian research conducted by those societies. Iolo was a brilliant poet, but his over-fertile imagination led him to forge a huge number of texts chronicling a fictional "Druidic" history of Wales - accepted without reservation by his colleagues, who were dazzled by his brilliance and learning. Iolo's forgeries and fictions continued to have a major influence on Welsh culture throughout the 19th century. His creation of a *Gorsedd y Beirdd* (a sort of "Druidical College", intended as an arbiter of Welsh moral and artistic life) and its subsequent placement at the heart of the National Eisteddfod (an *eisteddfod* or "session" was originally a gathering of traditional poets who wanted to share their works and compete for prizes) added a great deal of glamour and prestige to an event that remains one of the principal Welsh-language institutions to this day. In general, the sense that Cymraeg was a rich, ancient language with a romantic heritage worthy of international respect kept it on the lips of common people even when the Industrial Revolution uprooted many of them from their traditional rural communities and drove them into the coal mines. There was a flourishing

Welsh-language press, and many local literary competitions and amateur theatrical groups kept creative activity in the language alive even in urban areas. The sweet song-lyrics of John Ceiriog Hughes were known to everybody; and the modern Welsh novel had its beginnings with the works of Daniel Owen.

Around the turn of the 20th century a circle that grew up around the Oxford Welsh professor John Morris-Jones purged Welsh scholarship of its Iolo-ist fantasies and established it on a modern foundation. The period also saw the emergence of a large number of poets with powerful and original talents: Thomas Gwynne Jones, W.J. Gruffydd, Robert W. Parry, and T.H. Parry-Williams, to name a few. Saunders Lewis, a Liverpool Welshman and a founding member of Plaid Cymru (the Party of Wales), shook up the establishment with his controversial outsider's views on Welsh culture and, as a playwright, was one of the primary forces in developing a modern Welsh-language theatre. Kate Roberts became justly famous for her brilliant short stories on modern Welsh life.

In spite of all this cultural creativity, however, the increased predominance of English in all areas of public life and – especially after World War II – the penetration of almost exclusively English-language mass media into every Welsh-speaking community led to a marked erosion in the use of Cymraeg over the 20th century. In 1962 Saunders Lewis made a famous radio speech entitled "Tynged yr Iaith" (the Fate of the Language) in which he warned the Welsh of the imminent extinction of their language unless they took decisive steps to preserve it. This inspired the creation of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (the Welsh Language Society) which, through both political lobbying and well-publicized acts of civil disobedience, put the government on the defensive and gradually helped improve the public status of the language. One of the culminations of this series of campaigns was the creation of S4C, the Welsh-language BBC television channel, in 1982 after Gwynfor Evans – then-president of Plaid Cymru – threatened a hunger strike unless government pledges to launch the channel were honored. At first derided for its costliness, S4C survived its formative years and eventually opened up vast new employment opportunities for Welsh-speakers in the media. The 1980's also saw the rise of an indigenous Welsh-language youth/rock culture. The Welsh publishing scene remains very active, producing works in every literary field, from academic writing to romance novels. Stepped-up efforts at providing Welsh-language education have also paid off: the 2001 Census showed, for the first time in over a century, an increase in the absolute number of Welsh-speakers.

Nevertheless, all is not well. Welsh-speaking communities are still being flooded with English-speaking immigrants who have no interest in local culture and no intention of acquiring the local language, and who eventually eliminate the role of Cymraeg in local institutions. The continued erosion of the Bro Gymraeg – the areas where Welsh is the natural language of everyday speech – is a matter of grave concern, with serious implications for the future of the language.

There are marked differences between formal and colloquial styles of Cymraeg. While there is a "classical" literary style that most educated Welsh-speakers acquire and which is essentially the same throughout Wales, there are two major dialects of colloquial usage: North Welsh and South Welsh, which differ considerably in pronunciation, grammatical features, rules for contractions, and vocabulary. Although the largest groups of natural Welsh-speakers are in the North Welsh area, many learning materials stress South Welsh usage, since it is in South Wales that efforts to get people to re-learn Welsh have been most intense. Both dialects are equally prominent in the media.

# Track Three: Reconstruction

# Principles of Celtic Religious Reconstruction

## Classical Writers

The ancient Celts used writing sparingly, and never to make detailed records of their religious beliefs and practices. This means that the Celtic Iron Age has left us no legacy comparable to the Vedas in India, the Avesta in Persia, or even the Iguvine Tablets in Italy. Some writers have been led by this lack of specific written records to claim that nothing can be known of Celtic religion. However, such an assessment is premature. There is, in fact, a large body of evidence available that relates directly or indirectly to the religious traditions of the Celts. In the words of the archaeologist Barry Cunliffe: "It may fairly be said that there is more, varied, evidence for Celtic religion than for any other aspect of Celtic life. The only problem is to be able to assemble it in a systematic form which does not too greatly oversimplify the intricate texture of its detail." (*The Ancient Celts* (1997) p. 183). The field of Celtic religion can indeed be described as a vast, unassembled jigsaw puzzle made up of a huge number of pieces. Nobody knows for certain what exactly the finished picture should look like, nor can one be sure that all the pieces are available. The initial challenge is to identify which pieces really belong in the puzzle: this first stage has been one of the major preoccupations of Celtic scholars over the past century. At the next stage, an attempt is made to fit the pieces together. Eventually, as more and more of the evidence falls into place, broad patterns emerge, providing a glimpse of the entire picture.

In order to proceed with the long and difficult work of reconstructing pre-Christian Celtic religion, we must first establish which sources we can consult to obtain evidence relevant to the subject. Broadly speaking, there are five types of sources that will be of use to us. Each of them offers particular advantages, but also presents certain difficulties in evaluating the evidence we find there. We will here examine the advantages and disadvantages inherent in each of these five bodies of evidence in turn:

1.Classical Writers

Beginning in the 6th century BCE, Greek writers made mention of people they called Keltoi or Galatai who lived to the north and west of them. At first these descriptions were

sketchy and confused, but as the Greeks established colonies along the western Mediterranean they began to trade actively with the Celts, and their accounts became more abundant and more detailed. When, late in the 5th century BCE, large numbers of Gallic Celts, fleeing overpopulation and political instability in their homeland near the Rhine, invaded northern Italy and established settlements there, Celtic civilization came into even sharper focus for the literate peoples of the Mediterranean. As the Celts began to engage in more and more political interaction with their southern neighbors, Greek and Roman writers included them in their histories. Around the turn of the 1st century BCE, Posidonius of Apamaea, a Greek Stoic philosopher from Syria, wrote an extensive description of Celtic culture which has not survived but which was quoted from liberally by later Greek Stoics like Diodorus Siculus, Athenaeus and Strabo, as well as Latin writers like Pomponius Mela. Roman conflict with the Celts in Italy (as well as Roman expansion into Gaul) led other Latin writers to show interest in Celtic matters. The historian Titus Livy (who appears to have been of Celtic descent himself), writing in the 1st century BCE, gave much space in his writings to the early conflicts between the Romans and the Celts and may have included some items of genuine Gaulish tradition, available to him through his ethnic background. And, of course, his older contemporary, Julius Caesar, the main architect of the Roman takeover of Celtic lands, has left us a gripping account of his campaign, complete with detailed descriptions of the people he conquered. These are only some of the best-known sources: tidbits of Celtic lore can show up almost anywhere in Greek and Latin literature, sometimes in the unlikeliest places. In fact, one could say that the whole of Classical literature between the 4th century BCE and the 4th century CE is permeated with allusions to Celtic history and Celtic customs.

The advantage of these sources is that they are contemporary with the civilization they describe. Most of them are based, at some point or another, on eyewitness reports. They deal with a people living in close proximity to the Classical world, not a half-fabulous people from far away, so there is less likelihood that complete fantasy has seeped into the accounts. They do seem to represent a consistent picture of how the Celts appeared to the Greeks and Romans.

But this last fact points to one of the caveats we must bear in mind when we consult the Classical sources. The ancient writers who observed the Celts were themselves foreign to Celtic culture. They noted how the Celts behaved, but they didn't necessarily understand the motivations behind the behavior, and the interpretations they provide could be very far from

anything the Celts themselves would have conceived of. Since many of them saw the Celts primarily as a menace – a people with an alien mindset and highly developed military skills, ready to destroy peaceful towns – they tended to portray them in a somewhat sinister fashion. Those (like Caesar) who were directly involved in wars against the Celts would have had reason to exaggerate this threatening element, simply to justify their own campaigns. On the other hand, the aforementioned Stoic writers may have projected equally erroneous *positive* ideas onto the Celts: they saw them as "children of Nature", and depicted the Druids as wise natural philosophers, enlightened not by civilized learning but by the direct influence of Nature, as Stoic theory would have it. This is not likely to reflect the real self-image and motivation of the Druids.

Interpreting the Classical sources will thus require being aware that they may contain skewed interpretations while accepting that, on a level of surface description, they are likely to be highly accurate. There is no reason to dismiss out of hand everything that has been written by the "enemies of the Celts". While many Classical (especially Roman) writers display a negative bias in their descriptions of Celtic customs, they would have gained little by lying outright, when so much of what they said could be easily verified. Their errors and false assumptions are subtler in nature and should be evaluated with the aid of a good knowledge of the Greek and Roman cultures – how they saw virtue and vice, for instance, which would not necessarily have corresponded to a Celtic understanding of such things.

## Archaeological Data

Although the Celts were not builders of great cities like their southern neighbors, ancient Celtic communities have left us a great deal in the way of material remains, and rich new sites are still coming to light. Early Iron Age burials like the ones at Hochdorf and Vix give us a sense of how far afield the Celts traded, and how much they loved beauty, opulence and spectacle. Later sites like the one at La Tène in Switzerland, where huge amounts of metal objects were thrown into the lake of Neuchatel apparently as votive offerings, give us many examples of the high quality of Celtic craftsmanship, while also affording a glimpse of what may have been religious practices. Other sites, like Gournay-sur-Aronde and Hayling Island, were clearly intended for religious use, and can be compared to other ancient peoples' designs for temple structures and sacred space. Taken together and dated according to

modern methods, these data give us a picture of how art styles and forms of community organization developed together and spread from one end of the Celtic world to the other, and how these developments relate to the chronology of historical events recorded by the literate Classical cultures. Contacts with neighboring peoples and technological or artistic borrowings from them can also be documented this way.

The greatest advantage of relying on archaeological evidence is, of course, that it is *concrete*. We don't have to rely on reports that such-and-such a building, site or object existed: we can observe them with our own eyes. Carbon dating and stratigraphy can give us increasingly reliable information on the age of the finds. Excavations of settlements will tell us about the size of Celtic communities at various times and in various regions, as well as informing us on how they got their livelihood, and how much they traded with other peoples. By putting this evidence in chronological perspective we can get a good idea of the economic ups and downs Celtic areas went through. The distribution of Celtic coins also offers good material evidence for the geographical extent of the trading various tribes engaged in, and of the cultural influences they may have come under.

But the difficulty posed by archaeological data is that they are, for the most part, mute: they don't come with written explanations of their purpose or what they meant to those who produced them. The intended use of certain tools, household objects and vehicles may indeed be self-evident, but we will run into many ambiguous areas – especially where ritual use is concerned. How can we be absolutely certain that an object was designed for ritual and not mundane use? And even when we can be fairly confident of the answer (for instance, in the case of weapons and armor too ornate and delicate to be practical in battle), we still have no direct information on the precise intent and form of the ritual involved. Interpreting the data can often turn into more or less educated guesswork, with the near-certainty that any given scholar's individual tastes and prejudices will (at least on an unconscious level) color the interpretation. Sometimes this projection of modern values onto the mute remains of the past defines the "consensus image" the scholars of a given period have of an ancient culture. A hundred years ago, when European nation-states had colonial empires, encouraged nationalist attitudes, and competed actively with each other to the point of war, scholars stressed the military aspects of Celtic culture, seeing the Celts primarily as warriors who conquered and colonized vast territories. Today, as industrialized Western nations are more interested in developing a peaceful global market, the Celts are being re-imagined as

mostly peaceful traders, spreading their culture by example rather than by force. Of course, neither of these images contains the whole truth, though both are true to some extent. The silence of the material remains shouldn't tempt us to such oversimplified interpretations. Archaeological data will indeed provide us with some of our strongest evidence for reconstructing the ancient Celtic world – provided we interpret it cautiously, in the light of the other forms of evidence we are discussing here.

## Medieval Celtic Literature

Although the ancient Celts have left us with relatively few written texts (none of them of a mythological or narrative nature), during the Middle Ages their descendants produced an extremely rich and colourful literature that continues to fascinate readers today. The bulk of it is in Old and Middle Irish, but there is also a significant amount from Wales. Among the most striking elements in this body of literature are numerous stories about heroes from pre-Christian times, often with vivid supernatural elements that suggest ancient religious beliefs and practices. In one of the Irish literary cycles – the "Mythological Cycle" which has as its centerpiece the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* or "Book of the Conquests of Ireland" – a number of the characters have names that seem to be identical to names of ancient divinities known from earlier Celtic inscriptions, suggesting that the stories in which they appear may be, in fact, re-tellings of pre-Christian myths. The same can be said of the Welsh stories that comprise *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*. The stories that follow the career of the great hero Cu Chulainn (the "Ulster Cycle") agree in many respects with what both archaeology and the Classical writers tell us about Celtic warriors. The lore of the Fianna – strange fraternities of warriors who live away from society, in the wilderness – presents us with images that seem to reflect ancient attitudes towards hunting and the Land. One can expect a study of these sources to turn up many survivals of pre-Christian Celtic belief – and, of course, the sheer beauty and power of this material invites such study. Most people who feel drawn to the Celtic world can trace the origin of their attraction to the first time they were exposed to this literature.

The great advantage of the mediaeval literature is that, unlike the Classical texts, it was produced by the Celtic peoples themselves. Here, finally, the Celts speak to us with their own voice. The spiritual, moral, aesthetic and social values expressed through these texts have a unique flavor: they are clearly part of the deep heritage of Celtic-speaking communities. Whatever the age or origin of the stories themselves, they reflect a Celtic view of things, a Celtic interpretation of the elements they contain. They are truly a window on the Celtic world.

Yet we must always remember that they are not necessarily a window on the *pre-Christian* Celtic world. All the Celtic literature we have was produced at a time when Celtic communities were thoroughly Christian. They had been Christianized largely through a slow

process of internalizing the Christian beliefs and practices they had originally acquired from contact with the Roman world, not through conquest and colonization by a foreign power, so there was no sharp break with native tradition. Nevertheless, adopting Christianity meant that many native institutions and practices had to be re-thought and re-designed in order to meet the requirements of a new religious world-view. The old lore couldn't be dispensed with altogether, because it permeated the entire culture: the legal system, for instance, was entirely based on precedents, and some of the most important precedents – through which some of the most basic social customs were justified – had been provided by ancestors and gods in the mythological "time of origins". What was needed was a "new lore" that preserved the most important patterns of the mythological precedents without contradicting sources of Christian authority (like the Bible).

Beginning in the late 7th century and becoming systematic and internally consistent in the 9th, a major effort to create an acceptably Christian version of the pre-Christian mythology mobilized scholars throughout the Celtic world, but especially in Ireland. The *Lebor Gabála*, composed between the 9th and 12th centuries, is one of the principal fruits of this endeavor: beginning with the Genesis account of Creation and tracing all genealogies back to Adam, it then presents us with a very ancient pattern of six invasions that has parallels in other Indo-European traditions and is certainly carried over from pre-Christian lore. However, it is obvious that many of the details of the story have been changed. The characters that may have been gods and goddesses are never identified as divinities, but as humans with magical powers. Many of the names are certainly not ancient, and appear to have been invented by the writers. New stories have been added, often inspired by the Bible and by Classical literature. The same treatment was given to all the other narrative cycles, and the later the date of composition the more likely it is that a story was intended primarily to entertain rather than to provide information on an ancient precedent.

It is thus important not to think of these mythological stories as *scripture*: they were not written for a religious purpose, and every detail in them does not have a specific religious significance. The writers may or may not have known the pre-Christian meaning of their material (their degree of knowledge probably varied a great deal according to time and place), but their primary aim was certainly not to convey this meaning to their readers. In most cases they were not so much seeking to preserve the past as to influence the present. Certain families wanted to be associated with a particular hero, who then had to be fitted

into their genealogies; certain districts wanted to be the site of an important mythological precedent, and so on. All this necessitated the composition of new stories (probably based on old ones). So, if we wish to find the pre-Christian form of the stories, it isn't just a matter of removing "Christian interpolations" from old myths, as some have naively assumed. The stories we have were completely re-composed in a mediaeval Christian context: we cannot remove them from that context without destroying the essence of their meaning.

Yet this shouldn't be taken to mean that *no* pre-Christian elements can be found in mediaeval Celtic literature. There is, in fact, a great deal to be found there; but not so much in things like names of characters or incidental details as in the broad patterns of the stories: the types of characters; the consistent ways in which they interact; the way in which tribal divisions and whole countries are depicted; the basic beliefs about the world and people that are inherent in the narratives. These patterns were deeply ingrained in Celtic thought, and they continued to be expressed in creative ways long after Christianization.

## Celtic Folk Tradition

Although, at the end of the Middle Ages, Celtic communities were conquered by foreign powers, their leaders were killed or exiled, and native Celtic scholarship dwindled from lack of patronage, this was not the death of Celtic culture. The common people who lived off the land remained, under the rule of new overlords; and, despite periods of harsh oppression, they survived. They maintained their language, their ideas about community organization, their lore and their customs, many of them quite ancient. The need to relate to the Land in a sacred manner in order to ensure the safety of crops and herds had been their main concern for many centuries, and changes in religious authority did little to alter this. Christianity had nothing to say about fertility and the Land: it was accepted as a religion of personal salvation but couldn't displace the old tradition about relating to the Land, since it didn't serve the same purpose. There was an intricate ritual pattern that had to be followed through the seasons to obtain a good harvest. Within the last two hundred years folklorists have discovered and recorded these rituals (and myths attached to them) still surviving in Celtic-speaking communities. These traditions are extremely rich and clearly have pre-Christian roots. The myths often have parallels in the literary texts, but they tend to be more archaic, more intimately related to specific rituals. A classic study like Maire Mac Neill's *The Festival*

*of Lughnasa* provides us with a good example of how much material – varied but consistent – can be found surrounding just one seasonal festival in Ireland alone. There is an enormous wealth of resources there, and it has only just begun to be put to systematic use.

The most precious thing the folk tradition brings to our reconstruction effort is that it is a *living* tradition. We can excavate ancient temples and ritual spaces, but we have no certain knowledge of the ceremonies conducted there. We can identify ancient religious symbols and the attributes of specific deities but have no idea how they related to religious practice. In folk ritual, by contrast, all these elements appear in action: the context of the ritual is certain, and the ritual vocabulary is clearly defined. We know exactly which people are doing what, and in most cases we can also learn the purpose of the ritual and figure out the belief system that the ritual reflects. In many cases, there are still living informants we can ask about the rituals and their background.

Yet this, again, is not a body of evidence we can accept uncritically. Despite the great amount of ancient lore it has preserved, the folk tradition has always been eclectic. It is conservative because it clings to the tried-and- true, but if it finds something new that works just as well or better, it snatches it up. The Roman occupation introduced some Roman ritual concepts to most of western Europe. Norse and English occupations exposed Celtic communities to Germanic rituals and beliefs, many of which were similar enough to elements in Celtic tradition that they could be assimilated easily. All of this has been integrated into the Celtic cultural consciousness and can be legitimately called a part of Celtic tradition, but it doesn't necessarily reflect what the practices of the ancient Celts were like.

We must be similarly cautious when we deal with folk narrative. Some of it has a clear ritual purpose; some of it is intended as mere entertainment or personal fancy. As a general rule, the less a story is bound to a specific ritual context, the more likely it is to acquire extraneous elements that corrupt its earlier meaning. Not all such traditions are passed down orally for generations within the same community. Especially in more recent times, people have been getting ideas from books and other media, re-interpreting their traditions in the light of this new material, and passing the edited versions on. For instance, the Tory Islanders have a unique view of Balor, the grandfather of the god Lugh, which contrasts with the very archaic stories about Lugh and Balor found on the Donegal mainland. Whereas elsewhere Balor is a threatening figure who must be vanquished by Lugh, the people of Tory Island have a story about Balor being their ancestor. Before we accept this as an alternative ancient

folk tradition, we should take a closer look at its probable origin. Literary sources – which treat all these figures as ordinary human beings – name Tory Island as the stronghold of Balor. Although the ritual background to the story makes it clear that Balor was originally a mythological being and that Tory Island (like other islands in Celtic tradition) was associated with him because its isolation made it an Otherworldly place, in later centuries more stress was put (especially by literary elites) on the stories as historical rather than mythological documents, and there was more incentive to conceive of Balor as a human person historically connected with the island and its people, providing them with a new, prestigious lineage. Taking this into account, it becomes less likely that the tradition about the Tory Islanders' ancestry is ancient: it seems much more likely that it is a relatively recent graft from literary sources.

Such caveats should not discourage us from studying Celtic folk tradition for the genuinely ancient material it has preserved. As with all the other sources of evidence we have been considering, the best approach is to look for broad patterns rather than fixating on details. Once the broad patterns of ritual and belief have been well established, we can begin weighing the authenticity of the details from the way they fit into the pattern.

## Comparative Religion

The Celts, of course, were not an isolated people. On the contrary, they were at the crossroads of Europe, and must have exchanged ideas as well as trade goods with their neighbors. Theories about the universe, the nature of the gods, and the best ways to propitiate them circulated widely in the ancient world, certainly not excepting the Celtic realms. Moreover, through their language the Celts shared a cultural ancestry with other Indo-European peoples such as the Romans, the Greeks, the Germans, the Slavs, the Scythians, the Persians and the Indo-Aryans. All these peoples, although each later developed in its own distinctive way, inherited a common set of ideas about the cosmos, the gods, society and ritual. For the last hundred years the field of Indo-European studies has been devoted to exploring this rich and many-faceted heritage. Earlier scholars in this field have included Georges Dumezil, who first drew attention to the tri-functional model of society in Indo-European traditions; and Emile Benveniste, who catalogued the legal and religious terminology used by the Indo-Europeans. More recent scholars like Calvert Watkins,

Jan Puhvel, Bruce Lincoln, Jarich Oosten and many others have continued to explore the various aspects of these traditions. Through their work we have been getting an ever-clearer sense of the Indo-European world-view, and much of it is directly relevant to our purpose of Celtic Reconstruction.

Comparing the religious traditions of many ancient peoples will reveal broad common patterns that genuinely explain many of the details within them. To return to our image of the jigsaw puzzle, these patterns can serve as templates, guiding us as to where the scattered pieces should go. For instance, in the ritual formats of many Indo-European cultures we find a consistent body of ideas about the meaning of fire and water, the two primal elements that make up the universe and affect it in opposite ways. These ideas are spelled out in the religious texts of India and Persia, but are also illustrated by other rituals throughout the Indo-European world. The scraps of information we have about Celtic ritual and mythology conform to this pattern, so we can be sure that the ancient Celts thought about these elements in the same way. Similarly, common Indo-European theories of sacrifice adequately explain the little we know about sacrifice in the Celtic world, suggesting that the Celts did not greatly differ from their neighbors in this regard. The same can be said about many other ideas and practices common throughout the ancient world.

However, while comparative religion is very good at placing details within general patterns, it is much less good at helping us reconstruct details that have been lost. While basic ideas may have been passed down relatively unchanged throughout the Indo-European world, their implementation could vary a great deal from culture to culture. Rituals from different cultures are thus not interchangeable, even when they are based on similar premises. Because there are so many resemblances between Celtic and Indian traditions, and because the Vedas (the ritual manuals of ancient India) give us such a superabundance of information, we can be tempted to use them to "fill in the gaps" in our knowledge of Celtic ritual. This, however, should be done very cautiously, since there are instances where we know for a fact that the Vedic material would lead us astray. For example, we know that in both ancient India and ancient Ireland a horse sacrifice was used to affirm a ruler's sovereignty over a territory. In India the *ashvamedha* (a lengthy and complex ritual) involves a *stallion* that the *ruler's consort* pretends to mate with *after* the animal has been sacrificed. If, lacking any other evidence, we assumed that the ceremony would be exactly the same in the Celtic world, we would be wrong, because Gerald of Wales wrote an account

of the Irish version in the 12th century, specifying that the *ruler himself* mimed copulation with a *mare*, *before* the sacrifice. So, although the two ceremonies are obviously based on the same ideas and use the same ritual vocabulary, they are in fact implemented in almost opposite ways. Celtic thought wasn't merely Indo-European: it had its own originality.

Nevertheless, comparative religion and Indo-European studies are necessary to bring the deepest layers of Celtic thought into perspective. Once we are well acquainted with those basics, the maze of details we pick up from other sources will be a little less confusing.

## Correlating the Pieces

Having established what the sources of our evidence are to be, we must now begin to correlate all the pieces of evidence from all five sources into a consistent whole. It is best, however, not to proceed haphazardly in this, but to follow a particular sequence that will make sure we don't favor weak evidence over strong. There are seven steps in this sequence:

1. We must make sure that we fully understand the context of our research, and that we have the proper tools to do the research itself. In order to dispel the stereotypes and fallacies we get from popular culture, we must be able to access the primary sources that will give us an authentic historical and anthropological picture of the ancient world and of the Middle Ages (especially in relation to Indo-European traditions). We should have a good sense of the chronology (who lived when, what influences were being felt at what time – e.g., the 5th century BCE wasn't like the 4th century BCE), and of the way basic ideas about society and religion developed over time, so that we know which religious beliefs and ritual practices were associated with each time-period (much of this will be accomplished through Track One of this course).

Our research will bring us into contact with academic writing and invite us to adopt the research methods and standards of academia. This will teach us to be intellectually rigorous in our approach to the primary sources, and to make sure that all our conclusions are sufficiently grounded in the available evidence. Yet scholarly opinion should itself be treated with caution. Academia, as a professional milieu, is highly competitive and very much dominated by politically-based fashions. Academics often take controversial positions to

draw attention to their work and boost their careers; or, conversely, they follow the latest fashion to gain approval from certain quarters. In many cases, fashionable scholarly opinion is quite irrelevant to the purposes of Celtic religious reconstruction. Some scholars would indeed be quite opposed to the notion as a living religious movement. Others (quite prominent in the current academic scene) are hostile to the whole notion of "Celtic culture". We shouldn't be intimidated by them or look to them as unassailable authorities. Because the Neo-Pagan milieu has for so long been characterized by shoddy research, some within it now have reacted to the situation by holding academic scholars in exaggeratedly high regard. We should remember that the main function of academic research as it relates to our purpose is to lead us to a firm knowledge of the primary sources, and that scholarly opinion is just that: opinion, which may or may not turn out to be valid. Our goal should be to get a good enough grasp of the primary sources that we can evaluate such opinions by ourselves.

This first step in our research process will be the longest and hardest one; but it is the one that pays off most in the end.

2. Once we have a good grounding in the religious beliefs and practices that were generally common in Classical antiquity (and that were documented by the literate Mediterranean cultures), we can try placing the archaeological data from the Celtic world in that context. Can we, using criteria derived from the ancient world in general, clearly identify some Celtic sites as religious sites? How does their structure echo what we find elsewhere? What do the objects found at such sites tell us about the rituals held there, and about the wealth and social status of those who participated? What were burial practices like, and what do they tell us about beliefs concerning the afterlife? Did the practices change over time? Did different practices seem to be linked to different types of people? What do later Celtic representations of the gods suggest concerning native Celtic theology? As we look at this evidence, we should always bear in mind that Celtic civilization wasn't something isolated and static, but that it communicated freely with the rest of the ancient world and shared many of the same ideas and beliefs. It also changed over time, as all cultures do, while retaining its specific character.

3. We should now look at the testimony of the Classical writers and see how it fits with the archaeological evidence. Can we find direct links between descriptions in the texts and

the material remains? Does the Classical version of Celtic history agree with the chronology of cultural change archaeology presents us? Can Classical accounts of Celtic beliefs and practices shed light on the uses and purpose of certain religious sites and ritual objects?

4. Once we have integrated what we know of ancient and Indo-European belief and practice with what we know of the Celts from both archaeology and the reports of Classical writers, we must see if any reflection of this can still be found in the ritual traditions of living Celtic communities. Because agrarian rituals tend to be very conservative, they may very well preserve material from a much earlier period in a community's history. How much of what we find in the rituals fits with what we know from ancient sources? Do the stories explaining the rituals have obvious correspondents in other Indo-European traditions? If so, what does this suggest about their origin and meaning? How does the cult of saints in a given area reflect the manner of earlier polytheistic worship? How do the practices at holy wells and springs continue pre-Christian practices at similar sites? Can we detect an overarching pattern into which all the seasonal rituals can fit, with a theological justification for it? Is there a consistent ritual vocabulary we can nail down and use as a basis for generalization?

5. At this stage we may want to take what we have found and compare it with living polytheistic systems. Hinduism is a good choice, because it is one of the few living religious systems that is directly rooted in Indo-European tradition (despite its many borrowings from the other traditions of the Indian subcontinent), and because of the many similarities in the learned traditions of both India and Ireland that scholars in this century have pointed out. Of course, this shouldn't be taken to mean that Hindu and Celtic traditions correspond exactly to each other: they obviously don't. But observing a tradition like Hinduism in action can bring to life for us many elements in polytheistic worship that are no longer so easily accessible to our modern Western way of thinking. How does Hindu propitiation of deities resemble what we know from the ancient world? How apparent are its Indo-European roots? How does it resemble folk veneration of the saints in Celtic areas? What can we learn from it that will provide a living spark for our own practice? This is a crucial step in our process of reconstruction, because until we can *feel* what it was like to operate within an ancient polytheistic system all the knowledge we have accumulated remains a lifeless mass of data and will never turn into a functional religion we can actually believe in and to which we can

entrust our spiritual destiny. Many reconstructionist efforts founder because they are never able to access that living spark.

6. Now we turn our attention to the vast field of mediaeval Celtic literature. What can we find there that reflects the picture we have already assembled from other sources? Are there stories that provide more vivid and specific illustrations of themes we had established in a more general way? Can we connect the lore of the nobility and the learned classes (preserved in the literature, but not in folk tradition with its peasant context) directly to what we know from more ancient sources? What (based on historical evidence, not on our modern prejudices about Christianity) reflects the changes in world-view brought about by a Christian society?

7. As the evidence provided by all our sources begins to come together in large patterns, we must make sure that the final result of our reconstructionist effort has covered all the necessary areas of a functional religion. There has to be a consistent cosmology: a spiritually significant image of the structure of the universe, an account of how it came to be, and a sense of how it applies to everyday life. There has to be a consistent theology: an understanding of the nature and function of the gods, of the way they relate to each other, the cosmos, and humans. We need a consistent ideology of ritual (how and why it works), and a consistent symbolic vocabulary out of which rituals can be constructed. And there must be rituals that apply to all the important situations a Celtic world-view takes into account: the seasonal cycle (folk tradition has preserved this in some detail); rites of passage such as naming, reception into adult society, marriage and burial; occupational worship, relating to the divinities that represent one's calling; family worship, focused on the ancestors; and personal worship, relating to the individual circumstances of one's life. While much will of necessity have to be invented, all the elements for these must have some authentic base in an attested source.

# The Celtic Ritual Year

Before embarking on a thorough exploration of the characteristics of the Celtic

religious/spiritual tradition and the evidence for it in the records of history and folklore, it will be useful, for those who are intending to engage with this tradition in a living manner, to get a head start in the process by becoming familiar with the basic ritual calendar that is a part of the heritage of all living Celtic communities. By making yourself aware of this guiding framework for ritual activity through the yearly cycle, as well as getting a feeling for the imagery and symbolism associated with each important festival, you will get an intimate grounding in the tradition even before you begin to investigate it from an intellectual point of view.

The Celtic Ritual Year is divided into two primary seasons, a "dark" or "winter" one and a "bright" or "summer" one. In Old Celtic (the language of the earliest Celtic communities) these seasons were called *giamos* and *samos* : we still see these names reflected in the names of the months *Giamonios* and *Samonios* on the Coligny Calendar (a Druid lunar calendar from early Roman Gaul) and in modern Celtic vocabulary like Scots Gaelic *geamhradh* "winter" and *samhradh* "summer". In extant tradition these two halves of the year run from Nov. 1st to May 1st and from May 1st to November 1st. The "dark" half represents the Year's dormancy and is metaphorically linked to gestation, as the process of creating new life goes on hidden beneath the surface (much like a child develops unseen inside the womb), although above the surface the Land looks lifeless and harsh. The "bright" half, by contrast, is the period when the Land is awake and the growth of new life becomes visible. By extension, *giamos* is the time for turning inward, for reflecting on what has occurred in the previous year; while *samos* is the time for turning outward, for concrete activity. These two long seasons are in turn each divided into two, so that the second half of the "dark" season is seen as a transition to the "bright" half, while the second half of the "bright" season is a transition back into the "dark". Each of these shifts is marked by a festival with distinctive rituals, so that we have a cycle of four great holidays that divide the Year into quarters and are thus referred to as the "Quarterly Feasts" (*cethardae* in Old Irish). Originally the dates of these festivals were probably determined by a lunar calendar similar to the one still used by Hindus, but early in the Middle Ages they were assigned fixed dates based in part on the Church calendar.

The cycle of light and dark primarily reflects the yearly transformations of the Land and the consequent changes in human activities that relate to the Land. In Celtic tradition the Land is not seen as an inert, passive, purely material phenomenon, but is personified as a

goddess, so that people see their relationship with her as a personal one requiring that she be treated with respect. Thus the Quarterly Feasts mark changes in the character and appearance of the Land-goddess and ritualize the necessary shifts in human behavior appropriate to her at those times. Since we are completely dependent on the Land for our physical sustenance (whether we realize it or not), a positive relationship with the Land-goddess is a way of ensuring our survival, while also sharpening our awareness of how much the Land we live on shapes not only our material existence but our spirituality. The rituals of the Quarterly Feasts are the means by which a Celtic community maintains this positive relationship.

Here are concise descriptions of each of the Feasts, focusing on the ritual elements and meanings that are common to the entire Celtic world [the Feasts are best known by their mediaeval Irish names, but to give this lore a more pan-Celtic scope we here give, together with the mediaeval Irish name (and its modern form if it is substantially different), the corresponding Welsh name to represent the Brythonic traditions]:

## Observances

### *1. SAMHAIN/ CALAN GAEAF (November 1st)*

This is the greatest of the festivals, marking the beginning of a complete new yearly cycle as the Year enters its "dark" half. As the passage between one year and the next it is a "liminal" period, neither on one side nor on the other, so that the sharp separations between different orders of reality that are in force during the rest of the year cease to operate, and the Otherworld can become perceptible to us in this world. As a result one can renew one's ties with the dead, who are normally cut off from us but during this ritual period return to visit their original communities. Providing hospitality for the dead is one of the dominant ritual themes of the feast: food is shared with them, either by setting some food items aside for their exclusive use or by designating certain members of the community (usually the poorest) as "ambassadors of the dead" who then receive food in the name of the community's departed ancestors. Various games are also indulged in as a way of entertaining the dead and rekindling their interest in the world of their living kin. As members of the human community who have returned to the mysterious realm of the natural processes within the Land (by which humans are physically sustained), the dead

provide a bridge between the human world and the natural world, ensuring that a concern for human welfare – the welfare of their human kin – will subsist within the otherwise inhuman context of the seasonal cycle.

During this period of temporary return to chaos all boundaries and rules are suspended, and those related to gender, age and social status are especially ignored. The rituals of the season aim at restoring an auspicious order that will sustain the activities of the new cycle, as well as protecting households from the intrusion of dangerous Otherworld entities that may have followed the dead into our world.

Because during this season the surface of the Land turns harsh and barren, the Land-goddess is portrayed as the Cailleach, the monstrous hag who causes bad weather and makes things difficult for humans. Sometimes she is also given an animal shape, underlining her separation from the concerns of the human community.

### *2. IMBOLC [Oimealg/La Fhaile Bride]/ GWYL MAIR DECHRAU'R GWANWYN (February 1st)*

Although it is still cold and there probably is snow on the ground, this festival marks the first secret stirrings of the spring season. One of its alternative names, *Oimelc* (modern *Oimealg*), means "ewes' milk" and refers to the udders of ewes swelling with milk at this time in preparation for lambing: one of the subtle, easily overlooked signs of the coming of spring. The Land-goddess now becomes the Virgin Mother, the giver of boundless energy, the nurturer of re-awakening and growing life. In the Gaelic countries she is called Brigit (modern *Brid*) and has been identified with the 5th-century saint who bore her name, without changing anything of her ancient attributes and functions; in the Brythonic countries she is more often equated with the Virgin Mary, since the Marian feast of Candlemas (February 2nd) also falls around this time. Some seasonal myths have the Cailleach transform into this new manifestation of the Land-goddess, others state that she has been suppressed by the Cailleach and is freed on this date because the Cailleach has been defeated.

The rituals of the feast are most concerned with the beginning of a new agricultural cycle, a new attempt to coax food out of the Land and keep the human community alive and well. Many of them are centered on the hearth-fire, the source of domestic comfort and safety.

The restraining powers of the winter season are washed away with water (the old name

*Imbolc* means "lustration, washing"), and symbols of the increasing light of the sun are used magically in conjunction with foodstuffs to ensure that the household's ability to feed itself will increase as well. A great variety of community customs have the goddess actually visit houses and confer her personal blessing on the inhabitants, as well as giving people the opportunity to partake of her gifts of energy and healing.

### *3. BEALTAINE/ CALAN MAI (May 1st)*

This is the second most important festival in the Celtic year, the passage into the year's "bright" half, the true *samos* (summer) season. In many respects its rituals are an exact reversal of those associated with Samhain, focusing on dawn and sunlight instead of sunset and darkness. The mood of the season turns to sexuality and reproduction, and the Land-goddess takes on the form of the Flower Maiden, who is destined to become a bride. The myths told about her often stress how difficult it is to win her away from the stingy and unfriendly powers of inhuman Nature [portrayed as her giant father] and wooing her becomes an adventure undertaken by an attractive young god or hero. The courtship ends with their fertile marriage, which is often represented ritually. The blooming hawthorn symbolizes the events of this season.

Since the growing crops are now visible above the surface of the Land, many of the rituals are aimed at protecting them from the attacks of the hostile Land-spirits. Offerings are made to natural pests and predators, enjoining them to cooperate with the human community and limit their depredations. Great fires are lit to cleanse and protect the herds that will be sent out to summer pastures, away from the safety of human settlements. This is also the season when many medicinal herbs are gathered with magical intent by ritual specialists.

### *4. LUGHNASADH [Lunasa]/ GWYL AWST (August 1st)*

This festival marks the culmination of the growth cycle, the point at which the process of expansion ends and the process of turning-in begins; with the Harvest, the crops are taken from the Land and gathered in. It is the fulfillment of the agricultural work which was begun on Imbolc. The Harvest is made possible and presided over by the great god

Lugus/Lugh/Lleu, the Many-Gifted Lord who is an expert at every activity, can cross over any barrier and can, through his heritage, bridge the gulf between the deities of the Tribe and the deities of the Land. The myths of the festival tend to dramatize the occasion as a battle between the two groups of deities (sometimes portrayed as a battle between birds and creeping things), in which the Many-Gifted Lord is victorious and obtains the submission of the Land-powers, as well as permission for humans to remove the crops from the Land. The Land-goddess takes on the form of the Harvest Queen, who in Gaelic lands can be equated with Eithne, Lugh's mother.

The rituals of the season are held on a high place, associated with the Many-Gifted Lord as the god of lightning and summer storms (which are welcomed as a respite from the extreme heat). The first fruits of the Harvest (as well as wild foods like berries) are offered to the Harvest Queen, who blesses them and authorizes humans to make use of them. The Many-Gifted Lord's contest with the powers of the Land is commemorated through storytelling or pageantry. This is also a season for communities to come together as political and economic entities, with great fairs at which goods are exchanged, artistic works are exhibited, sporting events are held, and new laws are enacted.

Water – the cooling element – plays a major role in the symbolism of the festival, as the year begins to wind down towards its renewal in the darkness of winter.

Further Reading:

FREEMAN, Mara. *Kindling the Celtic Spirit*.

KING, Ohn. *The Druid Year*.

KONDRATIEV, Alexei. *The Apple Branch: A Path to Celtic Ritual*.

QUESTIONS

1. For each one of the Quarterly Feasts, choose three images that you feel, at this stage in your studies, best symbolize what that particular feast is about. Discuss the reasons for your choices.
2. For each one of the Quarterly Feasts, choose three traditional ritual actions that you feel, at this stage in your studies, best represent what the rituals of that particular feast are intended to accomplish. Discuss the reasons for your choices.
3. Which one of the Quarterly Feasts is coming up as you are writing this? How are

you planning to celebrate it? Discuss the sources for your rituals and the rationale behind them.

## The Indo-European Heritage

Over the past two hundred years linguists have been investigating the similarities between the languages that have come to be grouped together in the Indo-European family (spoken primarily in Europe, Iran and India), and attempting to reconstruct the features of the parent language from which they are all descended. Because, as language historians have discovered, language change obeys certain fixed rules, one can generalize about the way later forms of a language developed from older forms and apply the same knowledge to compare two or more attested languages that are obviously related, and reconstruct what their earlier, non-attested parent language might have been like. Such reconstruction involves not only phonetics and grammar but also semantic history: how the meanings of words and word-roots have changed over time, and how some meanings have been derived from earlier, related meanings. From following this semantic history back to the earliest re-constructible forms of the parent Indo-European language (which we call Proto-Indo-European or PIE) a certain picture of the culture of the earliest Indo-European-speakers emerges; we get a sense of what items in their environment were most important, which concepts were felt to be related, what specific concrete imagery was used to convey specific abstract ideas, etc.

Only within the last century, however, have scholars come to appreciate how much of the earliest cultural heritage of the Indo-Europeans can be reconstructed through comparative methods. By looking at the myths and rituals we find in attested Indo-European sources and analyzing the language used to express them, we quickly realize that, like the words and grammars of the languages themselves, the mythologies and religious practices of Indo-European peoples also point to a common source: they can be traced back to what must have been the religious worldview of the original PIE-speaking community, a worldview that is still reflected in the traditions of later Indo-European cultures, despite all the changes that occurred as these cultures acquired their separate identities. Often a good understanding of this basic common pattern can help clarify aspects of later traditions that are obscure or

poorly attested.

The Celts, as an Indo-European people, shared in this heritage: their beliefs and practices were rooted in the traditions they had received from the ancestors they had in common with other Indo-Europeans. Although they developed their own distinctive versions of this material, there is no reason to believe that these diverged more strongly from the PIE source model than what we can observe among neighboring ancient cultures. Since the pre-Christian Celts left very few written documents, and much of what we know of their religion comes from mute archaeological sources, a knowledge of their Indo-European background is absolutely necessary for interpreting the evidence we have about them.

The richest and oldest sources of Indo-European tradition available to us are the compilations of religious hymns and ritual instructions from ancient India known as the Vedas. Scholars disagree on when they were actually composed, but the prevalent consensus is that the earliest materials in them are from around 1500 BCE. For many centuries they were passed down as a strictly oral tradition which was the property of a specialized caste of religious professionals. They provide information about deities, the myths associated with them, and how they were addressed in ritual, as well as about the functions of rituals and the organizational principles involved in conducting them. Because of its abundance as well as its ancientness, this material provides a useful starting-point for comparison with other Indo-European traditions. Another important ancient source is the body of ritual texts from pre-Islamic Iran which, even though they relate to the reformed religion of Zoroastrianism, still reflect the symbolic patterns of the religion that preceded it. Ancient Italy – before the Hellenizing of culture under the later Roman Republic – also provides important ritual information. To this we can compare the scantier material we have from the Germanic, Celtic, Slavic and Scythian worlds – much of which comes to us from later or indirect sources. Ancient Greek culture also shared in the Indo-European heritage to a considerable degree, but because of its geographical location it absorbed an equal amount of Near Eastern (mostly Semitic) material, so that Greek tradition is less immediately useful than others in comparative Indo-European work.

By means of such comparative methods, Indo-Europeanists have come up with a general

picture of the common Indo-European belief system, of which we will now give a concise description: The Indo-European view of the world is an *eschatological* one: the world had a distinct origin, it grows through various phases, and it will eventually be destroyed. However, this process of creation and destruction is generally thought to be cyclic: countless universes have existed before this one, and will exist after it.

The original creative deity is originally conceived as a *monad*, such as the hiranyagarbha ("golden womb") of Vedic tradition or the Cosmic Egg of the Greek Orphic mysteries. Dissatisfied by its singularity, this first Being divides itself into two. This gives rise to the *binary* polarities that provide the world with its most fundamental kind of diversity: night and day, summer and winter, male and female, sun and moon, dry and wet, this-worldly and Otherworldly, human and non-human, etc.

The existence of binary polarity then gives the means for developing the most important form of relationship, which sustains the universe and produces all of its rhythms and shifting balances, and is the concept that informs all Indo-European beliefs and practices: that of *reciprocal exchange*. Even if they appear to be opposed, each of the members of a binary polarity possesses something the other one lacks and needs; by exchanging these needed elements, then, each can sustain the other. This is well illustrated by the PIE reconstructed word **ghosti-*, which is the origin of both the English words "guest" and "host". Originally the term designated two people bound by mutual obligations of hospitality: sometimes one of them would be in a position to give gifts or help, sometimes the other, but it was assumed that the giving went both ways and was to the advantage of both parties. Indo-European thought expands this concept to all the binary polarities in the universe, and sees it as the ideal way to encourage harmony between them. Heaven and the Underworld, gods and humans, seemingly opposed groups of gods and seemingly opposed groups of humans, all benefit by providing the other with what the other lacks, while receiving a complementary gift in return. In the case of humans dealing with gods, the exchange from the human side takes the ritual form of *sacrifice* – designating something from the human realm as now belonging to the realm of the gods.

The existence of something which can bridge the gap between two fundamental poles leads

to giving that third element an importance equal to that of the poles themselves, and thus to an appreciation of *ternary* structures in the universe. The third element can be: red Dawn or Sunset between white Day and black Night; Earth between Heaven and the Underworld; a god who moves freely between two seemingly opposed groups of deities; a goddess with two consorts, etc. As a rule, it is the element of transition: it provides movement and change. By extension, three becomes a perfect number, which provides completion – as, for example, with the beginning, middle, and end of a story, or of any other process taking place in time. For this reason divine powers are often seen as being triple in nature, indicating that they are operative everywhere and at all times. The significance of the number three can be intensified by augmenting it to nine (three times three) or even twenty-seven (three times nine – the number of the lunar mansions in Vedic astrology, for example).

# Cosmogony and Cosmology - Deities

As we have seen, the universe begins through a single being, who then forms a dyad. The myth of the creation of our world involves an original pair of divine twins, one of whom sacrifices the other (alternatively, they can be conceived of as a Primordial Sacrificer and a Primordial Sacrificial Animal). The body of the sacrificed twin becomes the physical world (the different organs of his body are typically linked to specific elements in Nature), while his spirit becomes the ruler of the world of the dead. This first sacrifice then determines the structure of our own reality, which is ternary. It comprises:

– a heavenly world Above, a place of clarity and reason ruled by the Sun and Moon and other sources of light, seen as the abode of the gods who protect social order and justice;

– a watery underworld Below, sometimes seen as connected to an encircling sea, the origin of all rivers and springs, a dark, chaotic place where all fertility has its source, but where the resident powers are irrational and dangerous;

– in the middle, between these two, the Earth on which human beings live, relying on the resources of both the Above and the Below, and perpetually seeking a balance between

them. The Earth is usually portrayed as four-sided, divisible into four quarters.

Running through the Earth's center is the Axis of all three worlds, linking them together. It is generally represented as a great tree with its roots in the underworld and its branches in the heavens, but it can also be a huge mountain with a tree growing on it. Through the medium of the World Tree the contrary natures of the Above and the Below can engage in reciprocal exchange: the moist fertility of the underworld allows the Tree to grow into the sunlight, where it brings forth fruits that fall back into the waters and replenish the nourishing powers of the Below. Although the opposition between the Above and the Below looks like conflict, they in fact sustain each other.

### *Deities*

Both the Above and the Below have their resident divine powers. The deities of the Below are linked to fertility, wealth and physical well-being, but they are unpredictable and not usually friendly to humans. They are often portrayed with serpentine traits, highlighting their ambivalent nature, capable of providing poison and healing at the same time. Because of their association with pure materiality they tend to pursue power and lust as ends in themselves, without any regard for ideals or morals. Some of them are vast beings who rule over entire natural processes, but many of them are purely local, residing in specific features of the landscape. Nature spirits associated with particular plants and animals can also be placed in this group. Typically the deities of the Below will cooperate with humans only when bribed with material offerings or coerced by the deities of the Above. The deities of the Above, by contrast, take an active interest in humans and will respond to them if they are addressed in the proper ritual manner.

Because their own society is a mirror-image of human society, they can be divided according to the three functions that pan-Indo-European tradition sees as essential to the survival of any human community: the First Function gives the community a sense of secure identity, establishing principles of truth and falsehood and right and wrong as well as normative cultural and religious beliefs, and legitimizing the authority of its rulers (its exponents are religious and legal experts, and intellectuals in general); the Second Function defends the community against outside threats, primarily through the exercise of combat

skills (its exponents are warriors and political leaders); the Third Function sees to the community's material needs, interacting with the Land to produce whatever is required to feed, clothe, heal and give physical enjoyment to people (its exponents are farmers, herdsmen, merchants, physicians – and women in general, because sexuality and reproduction play a major role in this function).

Following this pattern, we can place the deities of the Above into three main groups:

## Deity Functions - Ancestors - Rituals

*First-function deities* are concerned with truth and right action, with maintaining respect for law and testing the legitimacy of rulers. They preside over contracts and witness oaths and punish oathbreakers. Frequently (like the pair Mitra and Varuna in the Vedic pantheon) they have a dual nature, as the Friend and the Judge, rewarding law-abiding people on the one hand and punishing lawbreakers on the other. Law is maintained on two levels: social or customary law, which exists in codified form and can be fully understood (and obeyed) by humans; and cosmic law, which cannot be completely grasped by the human mind (and can thus be sinned against involuntarily – nevertheless, such transgressions must be expiated as well).

*Second-function deities* are fighters who can serve as models for human warriors. One of the most widespread deities of this type is the monster-slayer, who conquers the chaotic aspects of Nature in order to make the Earth habitable for humans. His weapon is typically a club; sometimes it is equated with the lightning-bolt, in which case his role passes to the Thunderer, the weather-god who sends rain to help people grow crops and who is thus seen as a protector of the human community. In some Indo-European traditions he is made into the king of the gods; in others he remains closer to the farmers whom he protects and whose needs he serves. Other warrior-deities are closer reflections of the military elites whose code of honor they uphold.

*Third-function deities* have to do with fertility, sexuality and health. Because their function is intimately bound up with physical Nature, they have a special relationship with the deities of

the Below, and with water. Chief among them are the Divine Twins [not identical to the Creation twins, but parallel in concept], who are usually given equine traits. Although both are portrayed as eternally youthful, amorous, and possessed of supernatural healing powers, only one of them is fully divine: the other one is mortal but is redeemed from death by his immortal twin. This ability to exist on either side of the border between Life and Death is what makes them capable of reversing the effects of illness. Typically the third-function deities have a magical pool which can restore youth, and a sanctuary where medicinal plants grow. They also protect travelers, especially if they journey over water. Because of their association with the Below there are stories about their being in conflict with the first- and second-function deities, but the conflict is resolved in such a way that they become fully integrated into the pantheon (while retaining their role as intermediaries between the Above and the Below whenever necessary).

There are also deities (often with third-function origins) who are transfunctional – who are by nature associated with borders and the ability to cross them, and thus cannot be limited to a single sphere of activity. Such deities can be psychopomps, guiding the spirits of the dead on the paths between our world and the Otherworld.

Goddesses are typically mediators of energy between physical Nature and the gods of the three functions. Power (*shakti* in Sanskrit) is portrayed with female traits; without it, the activities ascribed to the male deities cannot have an effect on the world. Often this coupling of power and purpose is portrayed as a goddess and god linked together as consorts. Culture-goddesses (who give energy to the creative aspects of human culture), on the other hand, tend to be unmarried (or, unhappily married, they seek the unmarried state), so that their giving of energy is seen as a function of free partnership with every deserving creative entity. The goddess of the hearth, around whom all cultural activities are centered, is typically a virgin, unattached to any specific individual or lineage. Another type of masculine/feminine synergy is manifested by deities of protection and healing who are brother and sister (like Apollo and Artemis).

A rich mythology describes the relationships of all these deities with one another as well as with humans. Among the principal myths found among most IE groups are: a primordial war between the deities of the Above and those of the Below, with the conditional defeat of the latter making the Earth a fit dwelling-place for humans; a tale of how the deities of the

Above obtained the drink of immortality; a description of how the conflicts between the originally separate goals of the three functions get resolved; and a future cosmic battle which sweeps away the current order and renews the world.

### *Ancestors*

The dead retain their connection with their living kin by being included in community and family rituals, where they are made witnesses to decisions affecting their descendants and are given offerings of food. Since the dead have become a part of the Below, such offerings are a way of maintaining a reciprocal relationship with the realm which is the source of all fertility: reminded of their kinship with the living, the ancestors will repay the gift by influencing the fickle deities of the underworld on behalf of their descendants. Often special rituals honoring the ancestors take place at the end of the harvest, when an agricultural cycle has ended and another one is set to begin; but all major sacrifical rituals, regardless of their primary purpose, remember the ancestors at some point.

### *Ritual*

The central ritual action of IE religion is sacrifice, which is conceived of as a communal feast with both human and divine participants. In order to ensure that the deities will accept the invitation, the ritual space must be carefully prepared and complex protocols must be adhered to, requiring trained experts who have memorised all the procedures.

In order to attract the attention of the divine guests, the ritual space is laid out so as to suggest a miniature model of the universe: after cutting it away from mundane space, a central axis is marked, and a careful orientation is observed of all the events taking place within its boundaries. Either within or just outside the space is a ritual pit for conveying offerings to the Below, while one to three fires serve to bring the sacrifice to the deities Above (though the actual sacrifice takes place on a raised altar). The ritual fire is itself personified as a divine being carrying prayers to the gods. The wood for the fire is carefully arranged in a predetermined manner (in large communal rituals the fires are designed to be of different shapes), with special invocations accompanying every step of the arrangement. Individual deities are presented with the appropriate portions of the sacrifice as prayers in traditional poetic metres are recited describing some of their mythological exploits, praising them, and requesting their help in specific matters. The deities Below and other unfriendly or

unruly spirits also receive offerings, with the admonition that they should henceforth refrain from harming the human community. When the deities have been given their portion of the sacrifice the rest is shared out among the human participants. Sometimes a special drink is made and consecrated to be consumed by those attending the ritual as a stand-in for the drink of immortality enjoyed by the gods (thus symbolically raising the humans to the level of the deities). Invocations are accompanied by a prescribed number of circumambulations of the sacred space, always done sunwise (*pradakshina* in Sanskrit, *cor deiseil* in Irish): right-hand movement is in harmony with the creative, life-affirming energies of the universe [by contrast, widdershins movement (*cor tuathail* in Irish) is destructive and only used in black magic].

Although rituals can vary considerably in scope and complexity – from small family ceremonies to gigantic national affairs – and can be adapted to different purposes, they generally all conform to something like the above format. Since the larger ones require considerable resources and much preparation, they are often sponsored by a wealthy individual on behalf of the entire community. Much stress is laid on doing rituals correctly.

# Section Three Suggested Reading & Work Sheet

Suggested reading:

A good general introduction to the Indo-European field is: MALLORY, J.P. *In Search of the Indo-Europeans*.

A good survey of Indo-European mythology is: PUHVEL, Jaan. *Comparative Mythology*.

The French scholar Georges DUMÉZIL was one of the pioneers in the modern study of Indo-European traditions. He is most famous for the stress he placed on Indo-European trifunctionalism, which some of his followers exaggerated to the point of absurdity and which some later commentators misinterpreted as a description of the genuine structure of Indo-European societies, rather than as the ideology that informed Indo-European thinking about society. However, the scope of his studies far transcends this limited point and continues to provide a rich picture of the complexities underlying Indo-European myth. Only a fraction of his work has been translated into English. The following list includes titles that can be found through a library search: asterisks represent titles of particular interest to this course.

*_Archaic Roman Religion._ (Philip Krapp, trans.)

_Camillus: A Study of Indo-European Religion as Roman History_.

*_The Destiny of a King_.

*_The Destiny of the Warrior_.

*_The Flight of a Sorceror_.

_From Myth to Fiction: The Saga of Hadingus_.

*_Gods of the Ancient Northmen_.

_Loki_.

**_Mitra-Varuna: An Essay on Two Indo-European Representations of Sovereignty_ (Derek Coleman, trans.)

_The Stakes of the Warrior_.

A very different approach, but equally illuminating in its exploration of Indo-European myth, can be found in:

LINCOLN, Bruce - _Death, War and Sacrifice: Studies in Ideology and Practice_.

LINCOLN, Bruce - _Myth, Cosmos and Society: Indo-European Themes of Creation and Destruction_.

LINCOLN, Bruce - _Priests, Warriors and Cattle: A Study in the Ecology of Religions_.

JAMISON, Stephanie W. - _The Ravenous Hyenas and the Wounded Sun: Myth and Ritual in Ancient India_. 1991.

[This is primarily a close study of two Vedic myths, but the long first chapter is an excellent, concise introduction to Vedic lore in general and to the nature and structure of Vedic sacrificial ritual, much of which can be applied to other Indo-European groups, including the Celts.]

WATKINS, Calvert - _How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics_. [A densely written academic study of ritual utterances and figures of speech in various Indo-European traditions that can be traced back to the most ancient strata of the Indo-European heritage. Invaluable to gain a sense of the style of Indo-European ritual language.]

Some other titles that will be of interest:

BUCKLEY, Joshua (ed.). _Tyr: Myth-Culture-Tradition; Volume I_. 2002.

BURKERT, Walter. _Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual_. 1982.

DAVIDSON, Hilda Ellis. _Roles of the Northern Goddess_.

DONIGER, Wendy (ed.). _The Rig Veda: An Anthology – 108 Hymns Selected, Translated and Annotated_. 1982.

DOWDEN, Ken. *European Paganism: The Realities of Cult From Antiquity to the Middle Ages*. 1999.

OOSTEN, Jarich G. *The War of the Gods: The Social Code in Indo-European Mythology*.

WARD, Donald. *The Divine Twins: An Indo-European Myth in Germanic Tradition*. 1968.

WINN, Shan S. *Heaven, Heroes and Happiness*.

WISEMAN, Timothy Peter. *Remus: A Roman Myth*.

An excellent introduction to Indo-European myth and ritual can be found at the following website: http://www.ceisiwrserith.com/pier/index.htm

A wealth of information can be gotten from perusal of past issues of the *Journal of Indo-European Studies*. Be on the lookout especially for articles by Eric P. HAMP.

QUESTIONS

1. Identify the following sources of tradition and discuss their significance:
    - The Yajur Veda
    - The Iguvine Tablets
    - The Gâthas
    - The Völuspá
    - The Mahabharata
2. Identify the following Indo-European deities by culture and by mythological role (mention any cognates they may have in related cultures):
    - Uertumnus
    - Aryaman
    - Bragi
    - Quirinus
    - Arinna
    - Aditi
    - Heimdallr
    - Pushan
    - Lucina
    - The Dieva Deli
    - Svarozhich

- ❖ Apam Napat
- ❖ Dazhbog
- ❖ Njordr
- ❖ Ushas
- ❖ Hestia
- ❖ Cinxia
- ❖ Agdistis

3. Compare the thunder-gods Thor, Zeus, Jupiter and Indra. How do they differ? What do they have in common that can be identified as the basic traits of a "thunder-god" type? What is your own response to such a deity?
4. From comparing myths about warrior figures, can you deduce what sort of ethos Indo-European warrior society had? What were the strengths and weaknesses of the warrior? What were the constraints on his behavior? How is this reflected in the symbolic language of myth?
5. What are the traits that distinguish the deity-type known as Hermes in Greece and Mercury in Rome? Can you think of other figures like them? Can you relate their many attributes to one single overarching trait? Explore your own reactions to a deity of this type.
6. What do Hestia in Greece, Vesta in Rome, Athena in Greece, and Sarasvati in India have in common? Elaborate on the significance of these aspects.
7. Explore the relation of third-function deities (and the Divine Twins in particular) to healing. What sort of imagery is associated with this function? Give specific examples.
8. Comment on the dichotomy between the "Mitra" and "Varuna" types of first-function deities. How do they work together? How would you see your own personal relation to them?
9. Imagine that you are going to conduct a sacrificial fire ritual in the context of your family or circle. Judging by what extant forms of the ceremony [primarily Vedic and Persian] have in common, how would you organize the sacred space? Describe every step of the ritual and give your reasons for every ritual action.

# Evidences From the Pre-Christian Celtic World

When the Celts first emerged as a distinct people in Central Europe towards the end of the Bronze Age, their cosmology, theology, mythology and ritual theory were all inherited from Indo-European tradition. As their culture spread to the Atlantic seaboard and eventually covered a good part of Europe, they came into contact with other, well-established cultures (such as the one that had been responsible for the Boyne Valley monuments in Ireland, sites like Avebury, Stonehenge and Callanish in Britain, and Carnac in Brittany) and were no doubt influenced by such contacts (as well as by the equestrian cultures that moved into Europe on their eastern borders), but they evidently maintained a basic continuity in their beliefs and practices. Unfortunately, because we have no direct written testimony from the Celtic world during this period, our information on Celtic religious tradition comes from indirect, circumstantial evidence: 1) from the works of Classical writers who observed Celtic communities before they were conquered by the Romans; 2) from archaeological sites clearly linked to religious practice; 3) from the inscriptions and iconography associated with religious sites under Roman occupation, which give us the names of the deities worshipped there, illustrate their attributes and often provide their Roman equivalents, helping us place them within the patterns of Indo-European tradition. From this evidence it is made clear that the details of belief and practice varied a great deal according to time and place: it's impossible to point to a "standard" that could be applied to the entire Celtic world, although one can just as certainly discern a common tradition and world-view behind the variations.

## Places of Worship

From the archaeological evidence we can distinguish four basic types of sacred space:

**1) The *nemeton* or sacred grove.** This was an area where it was forbidden to cut down the trees, and where the ritual space itself was often a clearing in the forest. This was usually a site for honoring local deities of the natural world rather than more widely worshipped deities whose roles related to social organization and culture; and as a result no major additions to the site's natural appearance were made. The site of Snettisham in Norfolk,

famous for its spectacular hoards of precious objects but devoid of significant architectural features, is thought by some to have been a sacred grove. 1b) Some of these "natural" sites are related to wells and springs that were known to have healing powers and attracted pilgrims in need of cures. The pilgrims often left ex-votos at the site (usually images of human figures, or of the organs requiring healing) as offerings to the local deities who had effected the cure. The shrine of Sulis at Bath (before its "enhancement" by the Romans) and the shrine of the source of the Seine near Dijon are famous examples of such sites.

**2) Circular sanctuaries.** These seem to have been related to major tribal assemblies, either seasonal or extraordinary. They were usually either on a height, or conspicuous in the middle of a treeless plain. A great movable wooden pillar (a symbol of the World Axis, establishing its surroundings as sacred space) could be erected at the centre of the site, evidently as a sign that the assembly was taking place; in some sites it became a permanent feature. Famous examples are the Goloring near Koblenz in Germany, and the site of Emain Macha (Navan Fort) near Armagh in Ireland. Such sites became rarer on the Continent as the Iron Age wore on but retained their importance in the Irish landscape. It is possible that they were related specifically to assemblies presided over by a sacred king, and that the waning of sacred kingship as an institution on the Continent (while it remained strong in Ireland) could explain the pattern of their distribution.

**3) Simple rectangular sanctuaries, or *Viereckschanzen***. Such sites are particularly abundant in Central Europe, although examples can be found all the way to the Atlantic coast. They are usually four-sided enclosures surrounded by a ditch, often with no permanent structures inside them (in some cases remains of a small building have been found – perhaps a shed for keeping ritual implements). A bilingual inscription dedicating such a space at Vercelli in northern Italy identifies it as being for the use of "gods and mortals". Evidently such sites were intended to host sacrificial feasts at which deities of the Above were invited to witness and bless important events in the community (such as weddings, political alliances, legal decisions, etc.). Most such sanctuaries also had deep pits (either inside the enclosure or just outside it) designed to receive offerings for the deities of the Below. A particularly spectacular example from Fellbach-Schmiden in Germany had a beautiful wooden sculpture of great stags (symbols of crossing the border between

cultivated land and wild nature) placed over the opening of the ritual pit.

**4) "Belgic" temples.** These are essentially elaborations of the simple four-sided sanctuaries, but much more complex, with many permanent architectural features. As their name implies, they seem to have originated among the Belgic peoples of northern Gaul in the later Iron Age and spread by imitation to other parts of Gaul and to Britain. The greatest concentration of examples found so far is in Picardy, and the most famous one is probably the temple of Gournay-sur-Aronde. Typically such sites have an enclosing ditch, a central roofed structure, posts marking divisions of the sacred space, a pit for blood sacrifices, and permanent locations for fires. Archaeologists have been struck by the similarity of this layout to that of simple Hindu temples: the rituals conducted there must have been very much like Vedic ones, and under the auspices of a class of religious professionals similar to the Brahmins.

**4a)** Some temple sites were clearly dedicated to a particular type of deity. Particularly distinctive were the war-temples where aristocratic warriors dedicated battle trophies to the deities who had granted them victory. Celtic warriors were head-hunters and believed that a person's soul resided in the head: obtaining an enemy's head, then, was a way of gaining complete control over his person (the Greek traveler Posidonius tells of seeing heads kept as heirlooms in scented cedar boxes), and giving such control over to one's patron deity enhanced one's relationship with that deity. Keeping the slain enemies' armor and weapons sacred within the precincts of the war-temple was also a way of honoring the deities of battle. Outstanding examples of such sites are the war-temples of the Salyes and Uocontii at Entremont and Roquepertuse near the Mediterranean, with niches in the walls for placing trophy-heads; and the northern Belgic temple of Ribemont, where decapitated warriors were propped upright with all their weapons in a grisly display.

**4b)** Healing shrines could acquire a reputation far beyond their local area and attract so much traffic that they developed into full-fledged temples. Permanent structures would provide housing for pilgrims, who probably followed a specific ritual regimen while staying at the site (under the direction of a resident priesthood), and left offerings for the deities whose help they had sought. Among the best-known examples are the healing-temples of the Treueri in the Rhineland, dedicated either to "Apollo" Grannus and Sirona or to "Mars" Lenus

and Ancamna.

## Deities

The pre-Christian Celts worshipped a great variety of deities that cannot be grouped into a consistent "pantheon". Each *touta* (a tribal group with a territory roughly the size of a modern county) had its own choice of divine patrons, not necessarily in harmony with those of their neighbors. Thus the vast majority of known Celtic deities were purely local (one cannot reconstruct a "Gaulish" pantheon, or an "Irish" or a "British" one). However, the *way* in which deities were worshipped was fairly consistent throughout the Celtic world, and the deities themselves usually fit into recognizable "types" with functions and attributes inherited from earlier Indo-European models.

The main focus of a community's worship was the local Land-goddess, whose good will ensured the success of the agricultural cycle. Each Land-goddess was pictured with attributes specific to the territory over which she ruled: she was often equated with the local river, as the source of the land's fertility (like Sequana, the personification of the Seine and the patroness of the Sequani), but she could be associated with other striking features of the landscape (like the hill and forest goddess Arduinna, who gave her name to the Ardennes in present-day Belgium; or Nehalennia, the goddess of the sea-passages among the islands of the Netherlands coast).

In addition to its Land-goddess, each *touta* had a primary male god who was seen as both tribal emblem and tribal protector, and whose attributes tended to mirror the community's image of itself. A group with a strong warrior-aristocracy and a sense of identity rooted in martial power often saw its local protector as a war-god; whereas a people more interested in the production of goods and trade might choose a god with more of a third-function character. Some community gods seem to have been competent at all the functional levels (this may have been the case with Sucellus, the "Good Striker" of the Aedui in eastern Gaul), and thus to have been self-sufficient. Although the pairing of Land-goddess and tribal god formed the core of community worship, this did not prevent the recognition of other gods and goddesses with more specific skills or attributes that made them attractive.

Here are a few "god-types" that would have been familiar to anyone in the pre-Christian Celtic world:

* A form of the Indo-European thunder-god, whom the Celts usually called *Taranis* or *Taranus* ("thunder") or *Taranucnos* ("son of thunder"). Extant iconography depicts him as a burly bearded man carrying the Indo-European thunder-weapon and, characteristically, a wheel. The Romans, naturally enough, equated him with Jupiter. A type of religious monument widespread in the Belgic territories of the Rhineland is the so-called "Jupiter column", which bears at its summit a representation of a mounted warrior defeating a giant with a snakelike lower body. This shows the thunder-god retaining his primordial role as monster-slayer, the champion of the gods Above in their struggle against the gods Below, and the protector of those who farm the land and are at the mercy of natural forces.

* A deity of the Indo-European "Lord of Riches" type, often bearing a vessel from which he brings forth wealth and nourishment, and often directly paired with the local Land-goddess. He has clear third-function associations, and in the *interpretatio Romana* is often equated with Silvanus, the "green man" god of the woods.

* A god associated with both battle and healing, and often interpreted as "Mars" (or "Apollo", if the healing function predominates) by the Romans. He is as much of a hunter as a warrior and is more closely associated with warrior-bands living by plunder and mercenary engagements than with the aristocratic warriors who officially defend the community. His ability to bridge the gap between the wild and settled worlds and between life and death give him mastery over illness and other disruptive forces.

* A god-goddess pair of healers, often specializing in eye ailments, with strong solar attributes, or a combination of contrasting diurnal and nocturnal ones. Their healing activity is usually tied to mineral springs. They may be a brother-sister pair, on the model of Apollo and Artemis.

* A god with an axe, shown actively chopping down a tree or trees. He is shown with a bull and three cranes (*Taruos Trigaranus*) whom he is apparently pursuing or defeating. The altar of the Nautae at Notre-Dame identifies him as *Esus* ("lord"). He is evidently another form of culture-hero and monster-slayer, somewhat on the model of Hercules.

This last deity appears to have been known in several different tribal areas and may be an example of the sudden spread of the cults of certain popular deities in the Late Iron Age, when some of them are found over a wide area, or even become almost pan-Celtic.

One of the most striking of these is the god usually known as Cernunnos, because that is how he is identified on the altar from Notre-Dame. The earliest representations of him are found among the petroglyphs of Val Camonica in the Italian Alps, dating from the middle of the Iron Age; but he is most spectacularly depicted on one of the inner panels of the Gundestrup Cauldron (an artifact discovered in Denmark but evidently created in eastern Europe, probably at the end of the 2nd century BCE). It may have been this particular depiction that launched the popularity of his cult throughout the Belgic areas of Gaul, for in the period immediately before and immediately after the Roman conquest representations of him abound on altar sculptures and in other ritual contexts. He is shown seated cross-legged, holding a torc (symbol of wealth and generosity) in one hand and a ram-headed serpent (symbol of the dangerous powers of the land) in the other, indicating that he grants material well-being while controlling forces inimical to survival. Sometimes he is shown as fat and holding a vessel of plenty, identifying him as a "Lord of Riches" – an impression reinforced by bags overflowing with coins. He is often shown surrounded by animals, and his presence separates them into categories – either beneficial animals on one side of him and harmful ones on the other, or domestic animals on one side and wild ones on the other. He himself has the nature of a stag, with antlers on his head; one statue of him portrays him with a deer's hooves. Some statues have holes in their head where removable antlers had been placed; they may well have been removed and replaced seasonally, like the antlers of actual deer. Since deer were the primary game animal of the ancient world and served as the symbol of passage across the border between the wild and the tame, Cernunnos's deer attributes express his position on the boundary between nature and culture, allowing the passage of beneficial things will blocking that of harmful ones. His worship was evidently very attractive to traders and merchants.

Julius Caesar in his *De bello gallico* reported widespread worship of a goddess he identified with "Minerva", the Romans' own equivalent of the Greek Athena. This implies a culture goddess who gives energy to a wide range of community activities. There are indeed representations of such a goddess, often showing her in triple form and engaged in a variety of creative tasks: she has a special affinity for smithcraft. Throughout Gaul and Britain she was called by related names like Brigindo and Brigantia and Bergousia, which link her with the Irish Brigit known from mediaeval literature and modern folklore.

The god whose worship Caesar saw as being the most important among the Celts was

one he equated with the Roman Mercury. His native name (although it is very rarely featured in inscriptions) was *Lugus*, which later appears as *Lugh* in Irish tradition. His popularity seems to have grown suddenly and exponentially at the end of the Iron Age, and spread throughout the Celtic world. His name is associated with very many Late Iron Age settlements: *Lugudunon* ("fort of Lugus"), Latinised as *Lugdunum*, is the original name of Lyon, Laon, Loudun, Leyden, etc., and Carlisle in Britain was *Luguvallium*. Celtic "Mercury" was portrayed in a variety of ways, some reminiscent of Graeco-Roman tradition, some not at all. He was worshipped on high places, which were later called *Mercurii montes* in Latin. Often depictions of him suggest that he had a triple nature, indicating an all-pervading influence unimpeded by any boundaries, and probably reflecting his command of all three functions. According to Caesar's testimony, he was primarily invoked for third-function purposes like trade and travel and acquisition of wealth (his protection of shoemakers may have symbolized his patronage of travel), but he was also associated with rituals involving the warrior-aristocracy and the concept of sovereignty (his name may be connected to a root *lugh- "swear", which suggests that he exercised the first-function role of witnessing oaths). The consort of Lugus, the goddess Rosmerta, holds a cup of drink which seems to be identical to the drink of sovereignty in later Irish lore.

The omnicompetence of Lugus and the rapid spread of his cult suggest that he took over the roles of deities like Taranis and Cernunnos and gradually relegated them to a secondary position in the devotional practices of many Celtic communities. There is a sense that he was a "little" god who took precedence over the other gods through intelligence and trickery rather than brute strength. He seems to have been associated with the mistletoe (both the smallest and highest of the trees, since it grows on the oak) – deity statues with mistletoe leaves are almost certainly meant to be Lugus, as are two-faced "Janus" figures, capable of looking in both directions across a boundary.

This brief survey by no means exhausts the great variety of forms deities could take in the pre-Christian Celtic world, but it highlights the principal traits such deities were likely to display.

## Priesthood & Ritual

Classical writers witness to the great importance of ritual and religious observance in the

pre-Christian Celtic world. As in all Indo-European societies, the proper conduct of religious ritual was entrusted to a class of specialists, whom Graeco-Roman sources refer to as Druids (*Dru-uides* "true-seers, true-knowers, experts"). By the later Iron Age Druids were described by foreign observers as having great authority in Celtic society, but they were only mentioned in the context of Gaul and Britain, never in relation to other Celtic areas such as Spain, northern Italy and Galatia. Scholars disagree on whether the Druids were an Indo-European institution the Celts had from the beginning, or whether they were a late local development that didn't have time to spread throughout the Celtic world (Caesar reports that it was believed that the Druids originated in Britain). Most probably they began as an inherited Indo-European priesthood but underwent marked changes during the period of cultural ferment near the middle of the Iron Age, from which they emerged as a powerful intellectual class (Celtic areas already falling under Roman rule at this time may not have been able to benefit from this development). The appearance of the "Belgic"-type temples and the rapid international spread of the cult of certain deities may well have been a result of the Druids' increased influence.

To become full religious professionals, Druids had to study for many years, and often attended prestigious schools outside their native territories. As a result they developed an internationalist outlook that facilitated the spread of ideas throughout the Celtic world even in the absence of any real political unity. They had an internal hierarchy and held regional assemblies at regular intervals, such as the one in the territory of the Carnutes, on the present-day site of Chartres. They may have comprised a number of specialized subgroups: the Greek writer Strabo states that, in addition to the *druides* proper, religious professionals included *uateis* ("soothsayers", "prophets") and *bardoi* ("praise-poets"). Elsewhere we find mention of a class of priests called *gutuatres* ("fathers of the voice"), who may have been "cantors" – the equivalent of the *udgatar* in Vedic ritual.

No detailed descriptions of actual rituals have survived, but evidence from archaeological remains makes it clear that they continued the basic Indo-European patterns of sacrificial ritual. From the lengthy studies necessary for becoming a religious professional (and from the probable participation of several "specialists" in major ritual work) one can deduce that the rituals, like their Vedic counterparts, were elaborate and complex. Some artwork (like the bronze figurines from Neuvy-en-Sullias) are thought to represent Celtic clergy engaged in ritual activities. Some objects found in burials (like the paired flat spoons from several sites in

Belgic Gaul, Britain and Ireland) are thought to be ritual paraphernalia, not unlike those used in Vedic ceremonies to manipulate specific offerings. Attendance at sacrificial rituals was evidently a form of religious obligation for Celtic communities: Caesar reports that the Druids could ban certain individuals from the sacrifices, and that those thus banned became social outcasts. Certainly this ability to "excommunicate" laymen would have increased the Druids' power in their own society. They were expected to advise and influence political leaders and could prevent military conflicts they disapproved of.

As in Rome before Hellenization, the rituals of Celtic worship were related to a very large number of religious feasts distributed throughout the year. One Druid calendar – set out on bronze plaques some time soon after the Roman conquest – discovered at Coligny gives us a general idea of how the ritual year was organized, although it affords us no clue as to how it would relate to our own calendar. The calendar is lunar, with twelve months of either 29 or 30 days each, and an ingenious system of added and subtracted days (and a whole "leap month" every five years) to keep it in line with both actual lunations and the solar year. In this respect (as well as in its dividing every month into waxing and waning halves, each with numbered days) it is very similar to the Hindu calendar, and both systems almost certainly have a common origin. Thus all the feasts of the year are, by definition, movable feasts.

Other religious activities may have existed side by side with this "official" cult. Family ancestor worship doubtless had its own rituals, although fewer traces of it have survived. There is mention of priestesses (working singly and in groups) who may have presided over a cult separate from that of the Druids. The *uelleda* served a warrior-group by providing them with spiritual cohesion even in the absence of a landed territory, perhaps in imitation of the sovereignty-goddess Rosmerta, the consort of Lugus. The famous *plomb du Larzac* (a lead curse-tablet in the Gaulish language) mentions the *uidluia*, who has the power to cast spells.

Burial practices are among the best-documented of Celtic religious traditions, and their marked changes over time must reflect corresponding changes in beliefs about the dead. The earliest Celts (in the Late Bronze Age) cremated their dead and placed the ashes in urns that were buried in relatively simple graves in cemeteries. With the coming of the Iron Age inhumation became more common – especially for important personages, who were laid out in state under grave-mounds, accompanied by a lavish display of grave-goods (like the Hochdorf chieftain). Side by side with inhumation we have indications that (for common people at least) excarnation (the exposure of the body to the elements and to carrion-

feeders, until only the bones remain – similar to Zoroastrian "sky burial") was also extremely widespread. By the end of the Iron Age cremation was again becoming popular [although the practice of placing grave-goods with the remains continued], until the imposition of Roman rule finally made it the norm throughout most of Gaul and Britain. Some late British graves include sacrificed dogs (guides to the Otherworld) and thick-soled boots (recalling Lugus the shoemaker, patron of travelers), suggesting a detailed mythology about the journey of the dead to their destined abode. Despite the changes and what they might signify, there is evidently a strong concern throughout for the well-being of the departed soul, and an implicit belief in another life beyond the grave. Indeed, Classical writers singled out the immortality of the soul as one of the most characteristic religious beliefs of the Celts.

# Section Four Suggested Reading and Work Sheet

Suggested reading:

CUNLIFFE, *The Ancient Celts*, pp. 183-210.

GREEN, Miranda, Ed., *The Celtic World*, pp. 423-511

["Ritual and the druids" (Anne Ross);

"Sanctuaries and sacred places" (Jane Webster);

"The gods and the supernatural" (Miranda J. Green);

"Burial and the Otherworld" (Gerald A. Wait)].

JAMES, *The World of the Celts*, pp. 87-103.

KRUTA, *The Celts of the West*, pp. 101-116.

Rizzoli The Celts, pp. 499-506

["Celtic Religion" (V. Kruta)]; pp. 596-604

["Celtic Religion and Mythology" (Proinsias Mac Cana)].

BRUNAUX, Jean-Louis. *The Celtic Gauls: Rites and Sanctuaries*. (1988).

DAVIDSON, H.R. Ellis. *Myth and Symbol in Pagan Europe* (1988). [covers both Celtic and Germanic material.]

ENRIGHT, Michael J. *Lady With a Mead Cup: Ritual, Prophecy and Lordship in the European Warband From La T ne to the Viking Age* (1996). [covers both Celtic and Germanic material.]

GREEN, Miranda G. *The Gods of the Celts*. (1986)." " " *Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers* (1995). " " " *Symbol and Image in Celtic Religious Art* (1989)." " " *Exploring the World of the*

*Druids* (1997)." " *Dying for the Gods: Human Sacrifice in Iron Age and Roman Europe* (2001).

ROSS, Anne. *Pagan Celtic Britain: Studies in Iconography and Tradition* (1967). " " . *Druids* (1999).

WEBSTER, Graham. *Celtic Religion in Roman Britain* (1986).

QUESTIONS

1. Identify the following deities and the place where their cult is attested (be more specific than just "Gaul" or "Britain"). Whenever possible, discuss how each one fits into the Indo-European patterns we have studied previously:
    a. Ucuetis and Bergusia
    b. Couentina
    c. Bellatucadros
    d. Luxouius and Bricta
    e. Uintius
    f. Poeninus
    g. Albiorix
    h. Nemausus
    i. Ogmios
    j. Teutates
    k. Uerbeia
    l. Lahus Paraliomegus (& Laha)
    m. Esus
    n. Cocidius
    o. Bormo
    p. Suleuiae
    q. Maponus
    r. Artio
    s. Damona
    t. Sucellus and Nantosuelta
    u. Ocelos Uellaunus
    v. Sequana
    w. Telo
    x. Olloudius

y. Banda
z. Moccus

2. Describe some of the "Jupiter columns" from the Celtic Rhineland. What aspects of Indo-European mythology can you see reflected in them?
3. Describe the mixture of native Celtic and Graeco-Roman deities represented on the altar-pillar of the Nautae (the Boatmen's Guild) found at Notre-Dame in Paris. What do you think the pillar means? Why did the Boatmen choose these particular deities?
4. Describe the "cippi" from Turoe, Pfalzfeld, Kermaria and Keravel. Do they remind you of something from another Indo-European tradition? What would they have represented theologically, and how would they have been used ritually?
5. What do Maponus, Cocidius, Uosegus, Arduinna, Abnoba and Cunomaglus have in common? What significance do you think this element had in the tradition? What other element(s) is it commonly linked with?
6. Compare a "Belgic" temple like the one at Gournay-sur-Aronde with a typical Gallo-Roman temple. What are the main differences? What are the continuities? Can you suggest what kind of Indo-European rituals could have been conducted in both kinds of sacred space? Can you point to a particular temple site that seems to be a transitional form between the two types? [hint: it's in Britain.]
7. What do you think the spectacular burials or immersions of precious objects and weapons were intended to accomplish? How do they relate to the burial shafts at sacred sites? Looking back to the "Jupiter columns", do you see a theological and ritual link to something that is represented there?
8. Athenaeus, quoting Posidonius who traveled among the Celts, refers to a Celtic ritual site as a *tetragonon*. How does this reflect what we know from archaeology?
9. What purpose do the shrines at Lydney Park, Aquae Sulis, Hochscheid, Luxeuil, Grand, and the sources of the Seine have in common? What symbolic traits stand out among the divine figures worshipped there? What part of the body are they most often concerned with, and how is this reflected in the symbolism?
10. Describe the outer panels of the Gundestrup cauldron. What sort of deities are portrayed there? How do you think they relate to the scenes on the inner panels?
11. What sort of ritual is described on the Chamaliares tablet? Which deity is

invoked? What sort of title does the priest of the rite bear?

# Evidences From Folk Tradition

When, over a period extending from the 4th to the 7th centuries, Celtic communities adopted Christianity as their official religion, many aspects of their religious practice of course changed radically, but others did not. Those areas of religion that had related to "political" themes – for example, the worship of deities who protected the nation and its aristocratic leaders – passed almost completely to Christian control: pre-Christian temples were replaced by churches, native ritual scripts were replaced by Christian liturgy, the deities invoked were replaced by Biblical figures and saints. However, in that area of religious practice which related to the agricultural cycle, to the continuing relationship between humans and the Land they lived on, Christianity didn't have a great deal to contribute, and native practices continued under a thin veneer of Christian imagery. Such practices survived into the modern period: while they've certainly changed since Pre-Christian times, having adapted to evolving circumstances and borrowed elements from many other traditions, they can still give us some precious information on pre-Christian Celtic belief and ritual – especially since the third-function, Land-based aspect of the religion isn't as well documented from archaeological and historical sources.

## The Cycle of the Land

In Section One we introduced the great Quarterly Feasts (*cethardae*) which are the most important dates of the Celtic ritual calendar. The basic structure of the ritual year should thus already be familiar to you. Specific rituals vary quite a bit from place to place, but they have features in common. Among the salient patterns are:

- A period of rest, usually beginning in November, when agricultural work is taboo. This is a period consecrated to the ancestors, when the dead are specifically honored but also when the traditions of the community – both historical and mythological – are re-processed, often through storytelling in a ritual context.

- The coming of spring (through a period covering February and March) is celebrated with a variety of solar symbols, all of which aim at awakening and quickening the power of growth in the Land. This often involves a direct link between foodstuffs and the power of the sun: circular-shaped yellow bannocks or pancakes – allusions to the sun but made out of grain products – appear in rituals where they are moved sunwise, suggesting increase of food even as the sun becomes stronger with the lengthening of days. Similar rituals involve milk products, so that the two main sources of nourishment for the human community are represented in the fertility magic. The tools used for agricultural work are re-consecrated at this time, often with a special focus on either hearth-fire or forge-fire.

- When the growing crops begin to appear above the surface of the ground, a summer ritual period (extending from early May through midsummer) concentrates on sexual, procreative imagery (especially flowers). Fire is also emphasized as the agent of quickening: brands from ritual fires are brought into the fields, or the ashes are strewn over the crops.

- When the crops are ripe, the Harvest begins. This is an intense, anxious period, as the taking of crops from the body of the Land is perceived as a kind of violation, which requires elaborate negotiation and careful ritual protocols in order to evade retaliation by the Land-spirits. In particular, special care is taken with how both the first and the last fruits of the harvest are dealt with: the persons involved are often given a quasi-priestly status for the duration of the ritual cycle. Water imagery predominates in this season, as the elemental power of water cools the earth and puts an end to the growth of the crops, while creating a nurturing environment for the next year's seeds. The continuity between this year's crops and the following year's seeds is often underlined in seasonal ritual.

## Storytelling

Many of the seasonal rituals are explained or commented on by mythological stories. As noted above, the winter season is traditionally (though not exclusively) reserved for the telling of such stories, which in Gaelic communities is the preserve of the *seanchaí* (Sc.G. *seanchaidh*). The *seanchaí* ("speaker about old lore [*seanchas*]") is not only a storyteller but a general loremaster who keeps in memory the important traditions of the community. Not all of the stories in his/her repertoire are related to myth (some are purely entertaining items related to international folktales), but the ones that are tend to belong to the genre called *Fiannaiocht* (Sc.G. *Fiannaigheachd*), which recounts the deeds of the *fianna*, autonomous mercenary warrior-bands who live in the wilderness and support themselves by hunting and gathering, and who, because of their liminal position on the border between nature and culture, facilitate movement across that border. Power of this kind is particularly relevant to farmers and others making their living from the Land, so the invocation of the Fianna during the period when the Land is dormant, and a new agricultural cycle is being prepared is easy to understand. The tales are structured around the life-story of the hero Fionn Mac Cumhaill, but there are many secondary characters whose importance varies from community to community, and in many stories Fionn himself doesn't appear.

Another type of story (sometimes explicitly related to *Fiannaiocht*, sometimes not) that plays a mythological role in the tradition displays a pattern similar to the "Grail Quest" romances of the Middle Ages: a hero (often a youngest son or a similarly disadvantaged or unpromising character) undertakes a healing quest in which he is helped by a variety of animals or magical companions, and in which the healing takes place through the awakening or re-empowerment of a female figure. Such a journey to the life-giving heart of the Land is also self-explanatory in the context of the ritual season. This story-pattern is pan-Celtic (and commonly survives in ex-Celtic areas as well), but is particularly important in Brythonic communities, especially in Brittany.

Other stories recount the deeds of local heroes or saints, which are often transparent reflections of pre-Christian deities and mythic patterns. In the Gaelic world Saint Brigit (Irish *Brid*, Sc.G. *Brighid*) has retained all the characteristics of the pre-Christian goddess whose name she bears, and many of the stories about her are directly related to seasonal myth and ritual. In Brittany *santez Nonn* has played a similar role.

## The Fairy Faith

All traditional Celtic communities have had a sense of being surrounded by mostly invisible but highly influential supernatural beings who need to be both avoided and placated in the course of everyday life. These beings are variously referred to as *daoine si* ("people of the fairy fort", Irish), *sioga*, *sitheagan* and *sheeaghyn* (diminutives of the preceding term, Irish, Scots Gaelic and Manx respectively), *daoine maithe* ("good people", Irish), *y tylwyth teg* ("the fair tribe", Welsh), *bendith y mamau* ("the mothers' blessing", Welsh), *an bobel vyghan* ("the little people", Cornish) or *boudigo* ("little beings", Breton) [all of these get translated into English as "fairies"]: many of the names are apotropaic in form, intended to flatter the fairies in order to avoid incurring their wrath or attracting their unwanted attention.

Fairies are said to "take" people (especially children – sometimes leaving deformed changelings in their place) into their own world, often permanently. Meeting the fairy host in visible form is often a sign of impending death. Certain hills (especially ancient burial tumuli) are said to be the local habitation of the fairies, where they live in their own societies under specific rulers (such as Finbhearra in Cnoc Mea, Aoibheall in An Charraig Liath, or Aine in the Loch Goir area). Although always perceived as dangerous, the fairies can, if given offerings and treated with respect, be beneficial to humans. House-spirits will aid in doing domestic work and protecting the household. Field-fairies (like the Manx *fenodyree*) will spiritually assist the work of the harvest.

There is clearly a relationship between the fairies and the world of the dead. Not only are ancient burial sites commonly associated with fairy dwellings, but people often see dead relatives or friends among the fairy host. Some aspects of the fairy faith are definitely reflections of ancestor worship. Other aspects suggest a link with the Land-spirits. The distinction between the Land-spirits and the dead (who have gone back to the Land) isn't a very sharp one in Celtic tradition.

One fairy being with a distinctive function is the one usually called simply the *bean si* ("fairy woman" – Anglicised as "banshee"), and her Welsh equivalent the *cyhiraeth*. Each one of these fairies is individually associated with an aristocratic family, and warns of the impending death of a family member with her wailing. A comparison with similar figures

from Scandinavian lore (the *disir*) indicates that she is a female ancestral spirit.

While most people try to avoid the fairies, some individuals have a special affinity for them and actively seek them out. These people then play a quasi-shamanic role as "fairy doctors" (*daoine feasa* in Gaelic, *dynion hysbys* in Welsh), using the fairies as messengers to ascertain the cause of illnesses and reveal cures, and also to restore stolen or lost goods and unmask criminals.

## Other Healers and Seers

The skills attributed to "fairy doctors" – seeing hidden things, knowing the secret properties of plants, foretelling events – can be found among a much wider range of people in Celtic communities, where they are not necessarily explained as gifts from the fairies. Some individuals have unique healing powers which can be exercised through mere laying on of hands. Others cultivate a systematic knowledge of herbalism, often referring to an eclectic tradition strongly influenced by Mediaeval book-learned herbal lore with its doctrine of "signatures", but also sometimes incorporating earlier native beliefs about local plants and their magical or divine attributes.

Some people have a congenital gift of "second sight" (*dà shealladh* in Gaelic Scotland, where such traditions are particularly widespread) – the ability to see events that are in the future or that are taking place at a distance. Usually these visions occur spontaneously and without warning, but some seers have ritual techniques for summoning up their talent at will when asked to check on the welfare of someone who is far from home.

For those who haven't inherited special talents for healing or clairvoyance, spells can be learned to facilitate such operations magically. Many charms exist for getting rid of warts or abscesses or for soothing pain – often involving a visualization of the ailment leaving the body in the form of a living thing. There are also many techniques available for divination – sometimes based on scrying in water after a suitable invocation, sometimes on observing the positions of randomly moving objects (like chestnuts on a fire), especially at liminal times of the year or day. The most common object of divination is marriage prognostication: in a tradition of arranged marriages, anxiety about one's eventual life partner is not unusual.

A specialized type of healing involves the ability to lift curses or dissolve the effects of hostile witchcraft. Individuals with this talent are eagerly sought out by members of their

communities and can acquire considerable prestige: there is a particularly rich tradition of this kind in Cornwall.

## Sacred Sites

All traditional Celtic communities have a strong spiritual sense of place: orientation is never random, things have to be placed "right" to fulfill their purpose. Some places with striking natural features or a long history of association with a historical or mythological figure are felt to be sources of particular power or to be privileged points of contact with the Otherworld, where petitions to the deities and ancestors could be sent with maximum efficaciousness, and blessings received in return. The most important such sites were the focus of pilgrimages which could attract visitors from a wide area; some of them survive under the patronage of Christian saints, but aspects of the rituals involved in them suggest that they had pre-Christian origins. Among the most notable are the pilgrimages of Cruach Phadraig, "St. Patrick's Purgatory" in Loch Eirne, and St Gobnait in Baile Mhúirne. Of related nature is the *Tro-Minic'hi* ("Tromanie", literally "monastery round") at Locronan in Brittany, which involves the circumambulation of an entire territory, with ritual gestures at both pre-Christian and Christian sites.

Another kind of sacred site is the holy well or holy spring. The spot where water, previously unseen in the secret world Below, breaks through into our world has the strongest concentration of the divine healing powers of water, and in ancient times, as we have seen, such a site was already the focus of much ritual activity. The origin myths of the wells have been transformed so that they can be attributed to Christian saints, but the basic protocols governing their use have not changed much with the coming of Christianity. Often, after actual contact with the water, the pilgrims leave strips of cloth on a tree (usually a hawthorn) near the well, either as tokens of their petition or for the grounding of the ailments they are discarding.

## Rites of Passage

In traditional communities, proper division of labor is considered to be of paramount importance, in order to ensure that each individual can contribute to the community with maximum efficiency. This means that children have to learn from an early age what roles will

be expected of them according to their gender and social status. Often this is dramatized through rituals that are enacted at points in life when those roles are about to be assumed. After Christianization, these rites of passage tend to coincide with initiation into sacraments of the Church (baptism, confirmation, marriage, last rites), but their folk associations often retain elements of their pre-Christian interpretation.

The precise nature of the rites will vary a great deal from community to community, but they tend to follow the same logic of progressive social integration: a naming ceremony, by which a child is recognized as a fully "human" member of the community, with definite kinship ties; the assertion of a growing child's gender, with the concurrent assignment to it of a gender role (i.e., replacing a young boy's skirts with trousers); the assumption of "adult" roles, usually at puberty, with symbolic initiation into adult tasks, normally by adult relatives of the same gender; marriage, which brings with it new responsibilities and a more central political role in the community; and funerary rites, whereby the departed one is mourned and his/her spirit guided to its new abode in the world of the dead, properly separated from the world of the living.

# Section Five Suggested Reading & Work Sheet

Suggested Reading:

[NOTE: Many of the seminal collections of Celtic folklore are now over a hundred years old, and many of their compilers' theoretical speculations appear quaint and outdated to modern scholars. Nevertheless, their actual descriptions of folk customs and beliefs – collected at a time when they were a part of living tradition – are precious and irreplaceable, since they can no longer be duplicated by observers today. These older works should, then, be read in that light.]

BENNETT, Margaret. *Scottish Customs From the Cradle to the Grave*.

BOTTRELL, William. *Traditions and Hearthside Stories of West Cornwall*.

BOYD, Janet and Colin. *Earth Rites: Fertility Practices in Pre-Industrial Britain*.

BOYD, Janet and Colin. *Sacred Waters: Holy Wells and Water Lore in Britain and Ireland*. [these last two books are good overviews with excellent bibliographical references for further research.]

BRENNEMAN, Walter L., Jr, and BRENNEMAN, Mary G. *Crossing the Circle at the Holy Wells of Ireland*.

CAMPBELL, J.F. *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*.

CARMICHAEL, Alexander. *Ortha nan Gaidheal/ Carmina Gadelica*.

COURTNEY, M.A. *Cornish Feasts and Folklore*.

CURTIN, Jeremiah. *Myths and Folklore of Ireland*.

DANAHER, Kevin. *The Year in Ireland*.

DAVIES, Jonathan Ceredig. *Folklore of West and Mid-Wales*.

DEANE, Tony. *The Folklore of Cornwall*.

EVANS-WENTZ, W. Y. *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries*.

GLASSIE, Henry. *All Silver and No Brass: An Irish Christmas Mumming*.

GLASSIE, Henry. *Passing the Time in Ballymenone*. [these last two actually deal with ex-Celtic areas, but much of the material presented is still relevant to Celtic tradition.]

HUGHES, Meirion. *Rumours and Oddities From North Wales*.

HUNT, Robert. *The Drolls, Traditions and Superstitions of West Cornwall*.

JONES, K.I. *Folklore and Witchcraft of Devon and Cornwall*.

JONES, Thomas Gwynne. *Welsh Folklore and Folk-custom*.

KILLIP, Margaret. *The Folklore of the Isle of Man*.

LYSAGHT, Patricia. *The Banshee: The Irish Death Messenger*.

MacCOITIR, Niall. *Irish Trees: Myths, Legends, and Folklore*.

Mac NEILL, Maire. *The Festival of Lughnasa*.

McNEILL, F. Marion. *The Silver Bough*.

MOORE, A. W. *The Folk-Lore of the Isle of Man*.

NAPIER, James. *Folklore or, Superstitious Beliefs in the West of Scotland Within This Century*.

NARVAEZ, Peter. *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*.

NUTT, Alfred. *Manx Calendar Customs*.

O CATHAIN, Seamus. *The Festival of Brigit*.

O SUILLEABHAIN, Sean. *The Folklore of Ireland*.

OWEN, Elias. *Welsh Folklore: Folktales and Legends From North Wales*.

OWEN, Trefor M. *Welsh Folk Customs*.

OWEN, Trefor M. *The Customs and Traditions of Wales*.

RHYS, John. *Celtic Folkore: Welsh and Manx*.

ROSS, Anne. *The Folklore of the Scottish Highlands*.

ROSS, Anne. *The Folklore of Wales*.

SIMMONDS, L.A. *Welsh Legends and Folklore/ Chwedlau a Thraddodiadau Llafar*.

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SPENCE, Lewis. *Minor Mythology of the British Isles*.

WALSH, Brian. *The Secret Commonwealth and the Fairy Belief Complex*.

QUESTIONS

1. Identify the following terms and place them in context:
    - ❖ frith
    - ❖ cennad y meirw
    - ❖ peller
    - ❖ Bábóg na Bealtaine
    - ❖ Cadi Haf
    - ❖ crios Bride
    - ❖ Goeldeys
    - ❖ quaaltagh
    - ❖ pota Padraig
    - ❖ an Lair Bhan
    - ❖ an da-shealladh
    - ❖ Mari Lwyd
    - ❖ ballain
    - ❖ an Anaon
2. What did Biddy Early, Levi Salmon, and the "Boy of Lowth" have in common? Despite the strong surface differences between them, can you discern a basic pre-Christian rationale behind their roles?
3. In the 18th century Thomas Pennant observed and described a Bealtaine ritual in the Scottish Highlands, involving an offering ceremony. Can you see how it reflects Indo-European theological and ritual ideas, as well as aspects of archaeological sites from the Celtic Iron Age? Elaborate.
4. In the same Scottish celebration procedures for making a ritual bonfire are described. Can you trace the Indo-European roots of this ritual?
5. Describe fairy beliefs from at least four different communities in the Celtic world. What are the similarities? What are the differences? What do the similarities suggest?
6. Describe three different instances in which fairy beings are said to have harmed humans, and three instances in which they have helped them. What does this say about the nature of the fairies?

7. Describe the ritual use of hobby-horses. What Indo-European theological concept can be seen reflected in them?
8. Name six plants that have strong associations with Celtic tradition, either for their symbolic or medicinal qualities. Provide detailed examples.
9. Is there a particular direction associated with the dead in Celtic tradition? Can you suggest what the reason for it is?
10. Can you see a particular pattern to folk prayers and invocations like the ones in the Carmina Gadelica? What differences do you see with the diction of prayers in institutional Christianity? What wider application could this have to Celtic liturgy?

# Evidences from Medieval Celtic Literature

## Irish Material: Mythological Cycle

By the time literacy in Celtic languages was becoming common in the 8th-9th centuries, most Celtic communities had become thoroughly Christianized. Educated Celts had been writing for several centuries already, but their medium was Latin, the language that had come to them with Christianity. While people learned in the native lore retained much of their prestige, that lore continued to be transmitted orally, as it had been in pre-Christian times.

There may well have been some tension between proponents of Christian lore and proponents of native lore, although it remains largely undocumented. Around the 9th century, however, a major synthesis between the two bodies of lore was made, probably as a conscious, cooperative effort on the part of Celtic intellectuals. Stories from mythology were re-composed to fit the new Christian environment. Myths of origins were made to harmonize with the Biblical model of Creation and history. Specific allusions to pre-Christian beliefs and rituals were largely eliminated. Traditional characters were employed to serve the political agendas of contemporary factions. New stories were invented using ancient native patterns, but also introducing material from the Bible and from Classical mythology.

This means that we cannot take the literary "mythology" of the Celtic Middle Ages at face value as a reproduction of pre-Christian traditions. They were never intended as "sacred texts": they make no attempt at presenting the viewpoint of a pre-Christian religious practitioner. Their aim is either to enhance the political prestige of whoever commissioned them or (especially for later texts) simply to entertain. We must always keep this in mind as we explore them for possible traces of genuine pre-Christian mythology. Nevertheless, if we examine them critically in the light of the material we covered in the preceding sections, there is much that can be discovered in them.

The "canonic" texts we deal with here come from manuscript collections that were compiled between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries. These include a huge amount of Irish manuscripts, and a much smaller corpus of Welsh ones. The bulk of Irish narrative texts come from the Book of the Dun Cow (Lebor na hUidre) (the oldest of these collections),

the monumental Book of Leinster (Leabhar Laighneach or Leabhar na Nuacongbhála) and the Yellow Book of Lecan (Leabhar Buí Leacáin). The Welsh narrative texts come from the late collections called the Red Book of Hergest and the White Book of Rhydderch. The much older Black Book of Carmarthen (Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin) consists entirely of poetry, but some of it is relevant to native mythological tradition. Other texts have come down to us in much smaller manuscript collections.

Although most of the manuscripts are no older than the twelfth century, the texts in them are obviously copies of much older originals, as evidenced by the language in them, which was for the most part reproduced faithfully by the copyists and often dates them to as far back as the 8th-9th centuries.

### *The Irish material*

The Irish material can be divided into three (or four) principal bodies of lore, which were originally addressed to three different audiences. These correspond in a striking way to the three ideal functional classes of Indo-European society, indicating that in their general features at least these bodies of lore have roots in pre-Christian times. The three bodies are:

**1. The "Mythological" Cycle.** This was the fanciful name given to this branch of lore by 19th-century scholars. It could just as well be called the "Historical" Cycle, since it deals with origins and lineages – the kind of lore specific to first-function people, who get asked about the precedents that support established laws and customs. This lore is itself composed of two main bodies:

a) the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (the Book of Conquests of Ireland), composed between the 9th and the 12th century, is a syncretistic account of Irish origins, beginning with the Creation of the world and of Adam as recounted in Genesis. The peopling of Ireland is presented as a succession of "invading" nations (Cessair, Partholán, Nemed, Fir Bolg, Tuatha De Danann), culminating with the arrival of the sons of Mil – the ancestors of the modern Irish – from Spain. The next-to-last invaders, the Tuatha De Danann, are a magical people with occult powers, and many of them have names that correspond to names of Celtic deities recorded from the Continent. Although "Tuatha De Danann" may well have been the name of a real historical people, the compilers of the LGÉ evidently chose them as a convenient context for stories about pre-Christian

deities who could thus be demoted to mere mortal status. There are separate story-texts that deal with episodes from this general plot-line, the most famous of which is *Cath Maige Tuired* (in two versions, one Middle Irish and one Early Modern Irish): this tells of the climactic battle between the TDD and their enemies the Fomorians – a confrontation in which Lugh [cognate of Lugus, the Celtic "Mercury"] plays the decisive role.

b) the Metrical and Prose *Dindshenchas*. This is "the lore of places"; where various features of the landscape have stories attached to them that cumulatively reflect the lore of a particular district. Many of these stories may well have pre-Christian origins.

Also generally related to this body of lore is the text *Suidigud Tellaig Temra* (the Settling of the Household of Tara), which explains the protocols of the pre-Christian *Feis Temra* ritual and the attendant symbolism of sacred space and the cardinal directions in such a way that the pre-Christian origin of the lore is obscured. Of similar interest is *Sanas Cormaic* (Cormac's Glossary), a list of obscure words (often with pre-Christian associations) compiled and explained (by fanciful folk etymologies, but sometimes with fascinating allusions to otherwise vanished lore) by the 9th-century scholar Cormac Ua Cuilleanáin.

### *The Ulster Cycle*

The stories of the "Ulster cycle" are said to take place around the time of Christ at the fort of Eamhain Macha, where Conchobhar Mac Nessa, the king of Ulster, reigns. The main character is Cú Chulainn, the ideal warrior-hero; and these tales are thus addressed to second-function people, the warrior-aristocracy who takes Cú Chulainn and his fellow heroes as models. Cú Chulainn is the son of the god Lugh and Dechtire, the sister of Conchobhar. The central tale in which he appears is the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (The Cattle Raid of Cualnge), which tells of an invasion led by Medb and Ailill, the queen and king of Connaught, to steal Donn Cualnge, the brown bull coveted by Medb, from the Ulstermen. As the warriors of the two kingdoms clash, their behavior exemplifies the ideals of the second-function class in early Irish society. Cú Chulainn winds up defending his native land by himself, and finally humiliates queen Medb, thus putting an end to the raid – which ends in futility in any case, since the brown bull of Ulster engages in an apocalyptic battle with the white-horned bull of

Connaught, and both animals are lost.

The TBC was evidently one of the favorite stories of mediaeval Ireland and exists in several recensions. Stories tracing the life of Cú Chulainn up to that point in his career are referred to as *remscéla* (preliminary stories, "prequels") to the *Táin*. These include: *Compert Con Culainn* (The Conception of Cú Chulainn, in two substantially different versions), his *Macgnímartha* (Boyhood Deeds, which include the hound-killing that leads to his assumption of his adult name, and his first feat of arms, in which the *riastrad* or "warp-spasm" that characterizes his fearlessness as a warrior first manifests); *Tochmarc Emire* (the Wooing of Emire), involving a trip across the sea to be initiated by the warrior-queen Scathach). Also related are the story of the founding of Eamhain Macha itself, explaining how the Ulster warriors' disrespect for a woman in labor has led to Macha's curse on their descendants, causing them to suffer from labor pains when they are most in need of their physical warrior-skills – a curse from which Cú Chulainn is exempt; Fled Bricrend (the Feast of Bricriu, a character who sows chaos and dissension among the warrior-aristocrats of Ulster), where Cú Chulainn meets a challenge from the Otherworld that establishes him as the paramount champion of Ulster (the story-pattern found its way into English literature under the guise of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight); *Aided Oenfhir Aífe* (The Violent Death of Aífe's Only Son) the tale of Conlai, killed by his father Cú Chulainnas a demonstration of honor triumphing over personal feeling; *Mesca Ulad* (The Intoxication of the Ulstermen), in which Cú Chulainn saves the warriors of Ulster from an elaborate ruse concocted by the Connaughtmen; several versions of a story in which Cú Chulainn becomes part of a love-triangle with Cú Roímac Dáire (the Otherworld being through whose agency he attained the championship of Ulster) and Bláthnat (Little Flower), who betrays Cú Roí to him; *Serglige Con Culainn* (Cú Chulainn's Wasting Sickness), in which Cú Chulainn comes under the love-spell of the Otherworld temptress Fand; and *Aided Con Culainn* (Cú Chulainn's Violent Death) [also called *Brislech mōr Maige Muirthemne*], which tells of how Cú Chulainn is tricked into breaking the *gessa* (personal taboos) on which his charismatic status as a hero rests, thus bringing about his destruction. Other stories set in the same time-frame but in which Cú Chulainn plays only a marginal part include: *Longes Mac nUislenn* (The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu), the tragic tale of Deirdriu's elopement with Naisiu; *Scél muicce Maic Dá Thó* (The Story of Mac Dá Thó's Pig), a hyperbolic depiction of an aristocratic feast at which warriors compete for the championship; *Echtra Nerai* (The Adventure of Nera), a spooky tale of an

Otherworldly excursion on the night of Samhain; and *Táin Bó Fráech* (the Cattle Raid of Fráech), in which the Connaught hero Fráech goes to rescue his family and cattle which have been abducted by apparently supernatural raiders from the Alps.

**3. Fiannaíocht or the "Leinster Cycle"**

We have already touched on *Fiannaíocht* in the preceding section, as it is a body of mythology that has survived in the oral tradition of Ireland and Scotland. Since it was addressed to third-function people (the people who worked the land), it was less attractive to the warrior-aristocrats who commissioned the writing of stories, and as a result (even though a few Fiannaíocht tales may go back to the 9th century) this lore is poorly represented in the earliest manuscripts. After the 11th century, however, when the High Kingship of Ireland was taken over by a southern dynasty, Fiannaíocht became fashionable because it was associated with sites in the south and could thus serve as a counterweight to the stories extolling Ulster heroes. In this guise, however, the stories became primarily vehicles of courtly entertainment, full of the same kind of spontaneous invention and embellishment that characterized Arthurian literature elsewhere in Europe, so that in time they were less and less a reflection of their original mythological function (as can be seen by comparing them to folk versions of Fiannaíocht, which are still tied to their ritual context). Nevertheless, they preserve some potentially ancient story-elements.

The central work of literary Fiannaíocht is *Acallam na Senórach* (The Conversation of the Old Men), which was composed in the latter part of the twelfth century. It tells of how Caílte and Oisín (Fionn Mac Cumhail's son) return to Ireland from the Otherworld in the time of St Patrick, and join the saint and his entourage on a journey around the island, engaging in a form of *dindshenchas* as various features of the landscape inspire the two ancient heroes to tell of the deeds of the Fianna in those places long ago. Much of it is a satire of contemporary Ireland, with its newly "Romanized", authoritarian, Norman-dominated Church hierarchy, nostalgically contrasted with the freedom of Ireland in past centuries. The anecdotes are not told in chronological order, but a basic plotline relating the life of Fionn Mac Cumhail and his companions had evidently long ago been established by storytellers (who situated it in the 3rd century CE), and serves as a backdrop here and in the very many other Fiannaíocht texts from Late Mediaeval and Early Modern sources.

Much of the characteristic tone of Fiannaíocht comes from the variety and vivid individuality of its characters, who need to cooperate in spite of their differences in order to survive in the wilderness. In this they differ radically from the warrior-aristocrats depicted in the Ulster Cycle, who primarily compete for the same roles in their society. Among the well-characterized companions of Fionn in his Clann Baíscne are the diplomatic Caílte; the Otherworldly Oisín; the seductive Diarmaid; the scrupulously fair Oscar (Fionn's grandson); and the impulsive but cowardly bully Conán. Fionn also has a perpetual rival in Goll mac Morna, the leader of another *fian*. The background plot of the cycle recounts Fionn's unusual birth, his fostering and precocious boyhood deeds (told in *Macgnímartha Finn*), including his accidental gaining of supernatural wisdom from tasting the Salmon of Knowledge; his recapture of the status of *rig-fhénnid* ["royal Fenian" – the leader of the mercenary band contracted to the High King], which had been taken from Fionn's father by Goll Mac Morna; the acquisition of his two hounds, Bran and Sceolaing, who are in fact his nephews in animal form; the birth of his son Oisín from Sadb, a woman changed into a doe; Fionn's own death-and-resurrection in a magical pool, which confers powers of healing on him; his marriage in old age to the princess Gráinne, who elopes with Diarmaid, with tragic consequences (told in *Tóraigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne*); and the final destruction of the Fianna at the battle of Gabhra, due to a quarrel with the High King Cairbre Lifechair, who had disrespected them by not honoring their traditional role in approving and blessing the marriages of royal females (as told in *Cath Gabhra*). Typically, however, Fiannaíocht tales deal with episodic adventures in the wild, where the Fianna encounter magical creatures, are tested by them, and sometimes receive Otherworldly weapons or tools in reward.

Some of the many other Late Mediaeval or Early Modern stories dealing with Fiannaíocht include: *Uath Beinne Etair*; *Feis Tighe Chonáin*; *Bruidhean Bheag na hAlmhan*; *An Bhruidhean Chaorthainn*; *Cath Fionntrágha*; and *Eachtra an Ghiolla Dheacair*.

The 17th-century collection *Duanaire Finn* comprises sixty-nine narrative poems dealing with Fiannaíocht, and suggests how this lore was performed publicly, sung (or rather chanted) in verse. Since some of the material in *Duanaire Finn* has close cognates in folk tradition, this collection serves as a bridge between literary and traditional Fiannaíocht. Similar examples of literary Fiannaíocht from Scotland survive in the Book of the Dean of Lismore.

### *The Cycle of the Kings.*

A number of mediaeval Irish stories deal with incidents in the lives of pre-Christian High Kings who probably had real historical existence. On one level this material is a continuation of the first-function lore about origins and lineage and is treated as such (for instance, there is a "roll of kings" near the end of the LGÉ), but some of it clearly has a distinct function related to that of kingship itself. As the linchpin around whom all of society turns, the High King (even though he comes from the second-function class of the warrior-aristocracy and exercises the sovereignty aspect of the first function) in some ways both transcends the three functions and represents the virtues of all of them. He holds sovereignty by virtue of a ritual marriage with the Land, and retains it only as long as he displays the physical and moral integrity that make him fit for it. Stories about the kingship, then, explicate this lore (which is remarkably rich in pre-Christian elements) and serve as exemplary (or cautionary) models for actual rulers.

The kings who appear most often in these stories are Niall Naigiallach, the eponymous ancestor of the Uí Néill; Conn Céadchathach; and Cormac Mac Airt, his grandson. *Echtra Mac nEchach Muigmedóin* (The Adventure of the Sons of Eochu Muigmedón) tells of how the Sovereignty of Ireland [personified as a goddess] chose Niall to be High King because he could recognize her in the form of a repulsive hag. *Baile in Scáil* (The Trance of the Phantom) recounts the Otherworldly version of Conn's coronation: he is led by the god Lugh to a sacred enclosure where he marries the Sovereignty of Ireland. The same Sovereignty-goddess appears in another story as Medb Lethderg, whom Cormac Mac Airt must sleep with before he can accede to the kingship.

Often the relationship of the king with Sovereignty is symbolized by his relationship with his queen, and an Otherworldly rival appears with whom he must compete for the queen's affections. Striking examples of this theme are *Tochmarc Étaíne* (The Wooing of Étaín), where Étaín, the lover of the divine Mider, becomes incarnate as a mortal woman and marries the king Eochaid Airem, who then has to resist Mider's renewed claim to her; and *Echtrae Cormaic*, where it is Manannán Mac Lir who tries to steal away Cormac Mac Airt's queen, and who rewards the king when he refuses to yield. In *Echtrae Airt Meic Cuinn* we see Conn contract an inappropriate liaison with a negative Otherworldly figure, Bé Chuma, which leads to the destruction of the kingdom until he is rescued by his son Art. [Another famous story, *Cath Maige Mucrama*, tells both of Art's death and of the birth of his illustrious son

Cormac.] *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* (The Taking of Da Derga's Hostel) recounts the life of Conaire Mór, who is chosen to be High King through both divine protection and druidical divination, but eventually loses that divine protection when he breaks his *gessa* (ritually ordained taboos) and is brought to a truly spectacular end.

Writings related to the theme of these stories include *Tecosca Cormaic* (The Teachings of Cormac) and *Audacht Morainn* (The Testament of Morann [an Ulster Cycle druid]) – teaching texts expounding on the virtues a righteous ruler should exhibit.

**5. *Immrama*.**

Not directly related to the cycles discussed above and representing a genre in itself is the *immram* or 'voyage' tale (modern: *iomramh*). This is a descendant of a very ancient story-type featuring voyages by ship among fantastic islands (Homer's Odyssey and the Sinbad stories in the Thousand and One Nights are famous earlier examples), but in its Irish guise it seems to have a more specific teaching function, giving information about the Otherworld and what is beyond death. The best-known and most influential one is the Latin *Navigatio Sancti Brandanni*; but the more richly imaginative Irish-language examples include *Immram Brain*, *Immram Curaig Maíle Dúin*, and the Voyages of Snédgus and of the Uí Chorra. [ *Echtrae Conlai*, although it is not truly a voyage story, contains many of the introductory elements that appear in *immrama* and is obviously related to that genre.]

*Immrama* are highly eclectic in their contents and are often overtly Christian in their concerns: the wild images in them are a very original allegorization of Christian theological themes as they relate to Heaven and the life of the blessed. Two of these texts, however, seem to contain older material as well: *Immram Brain* has Bran Mac Febail sail to an Otherworldly Land of Women; and *Immram Curaig Maíle Dúin* is full of surrealistic and obscure incidents that have no clear relation to Christianity at all. Alwyn and Brinly Rees have suggested that it may reflect a "Celtic Book of the Dead" – an earlier use of the *immram* as a teaching tool about pre-Christian conceptions of the Otherworld.

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One should mention that there are many fictional stories in Early Modern Irish literature that are loosely related to earlier traditions but are clearly rooted in a much later world-view.

Among the most famous and influential of these stories are the *Trí Truagha na Sgéalaidheachta* (The Three Sorrows of Storytelling), comprised of *Oidheadh Cloinne Lir* (the story of the children of Ler, changed into swans), *Oidhe Cloinne Tuireann* (about the vengeance exacted by Lugh on the children of Tuirenn, inspired by the "Mythological" Cycle), and *Oidheadh Cloinne Uisnigh* (a re-working of the Deirdre story from the Ulster Cycle).

### *The Welsh Material*

The early Welsh literary texts that deal in some way with mythological material are much less extensive than the Irish ones. Of central importance are the eleven prose tales found in the White Book of Rhydderch and the Red Book of Hergest and collected in the 19th century by Lady Charlotte Guest under the title *The Mabinogion*. They are evidently just the tip of the iceberg, a small sample of what was once a rich and inventive storytelling tradition, much of which is now lost to us, but additional fragments of which can be gleaned from other sources.

The relevant Welsh material can be divided into the following categories:

**1. *Pedeir Keinc y Mabinogi*** (The Four Branches of the Mabinogi).

These are four interconnected tales (or one long tale designed to be told in four sections) probably composed in the early twelfth century. The first, *Pwyll pendeuic Dyuet*, tells of how Pwyll, the prince of Dyfed in south-west Wales, makes an alliance with an Otherworld ruler and eventually marries Rhiannon, a woman he sees in a vision at a magical site. After losing Rhiannon and having to win her back, he also loses and regains the son he has by her, Pryderi (the central character whose life story extends over all four branches). The second branch, *Branwen uerch Llyr*, focuses on the five children of Llyr – one of whom, Branwen, is given by her giant brother Bran in marriage to the king of Ireland, who mistreats her, occasioning the apocalyptic battle of Morddwyd Tyllion, in which most of the warriors of both islands die. The lone survivor of Llyr's family, Manawyddan (after whom the third branch, *Manawydan uab Llyr*, is named), is welcomed by Pryderi and allowed to marry the now-widowed Rhiannon. But an Otherworld curse falls upon Dyfed, first causing all of its inhabitants to vanish, and then leading Rhiannon and Pryderi to be taken prisoner in a fairy fort. Manawyddan is left alone with Pryderi's wife Cigfa to outwit the Otherworld beings who initiated the curse – which he does when he comes upon them in the form of mice. The final

branch, *Math uab Mathonuy*, takes us to Gwynedd in North Wales, where the magician-king Math rules in the name of his sister Dôn, and is under a ritual taboo to have his feet held in a virgin's lap. In order to satisfy the lusts of his brother Gilfaethwy – who has his eye on the virgin foot-holder – Math's nephew Gwydion (a powerful magician himself) mounts a diversion that leads to war between Gwynedd and Dyfed, and to the death of Pryderi. Gilfaethwy's lust is satisfied, but the two brothers are punished, and Math is left without his ritual foot-holder. When Gwydion's sister Arianrhod is offered as a substitute, despite her presumed virgin status she gives birth to two sons, one of whom is Lleu Llaw Gyffes (whose name is a cognate of Irish *Lugh* and Gallo-Brittonic *Lugus*) who is at once taken under the wing of his uncle Gwydion. In her humiliation Arianrhod places a threefold curse on Lleu, but its effects are reversed by Gwydion's trickery. Lleu is given a wife magically created out of flowers who eventually betrays him to another lover. After a long search Gwydion is able to find his nephew's spirit and return him to life, allowing him to avenge himself on both his flower-wife and his rival. The entire sequence of tales is imagined to take place in the first century BCE, around the time of Julius Caesar's invasion of Britain.

There are striking resemblances between episodes in the Four Branches and events described in the Irish "Mythological" Cycle, and the Plant Dôn who are the main focus of the fourth story appear to be cognates of the Tuatha De Danann, suggesting that the Mabinogi has its source in the same materials that were used in the first-function mythology of Ireland. The threefold curse placed on Lleu has a clear trifunctional structure which ties it to ancient Indo-European tradition; and the treacherous flower-bride Blodeuwedd (Flower-Face) is obviously a cognate of Bláthnat (Little Flower) who betrays Cú Ro' to Cú Chulainn in the Ulster Cycle.

**2. The Independent Native Tales.**

Four stories in the "Mabinogion" collection represent native traditions that are independent of the Arthurian romance themes that began spreading from the British-Celtic world to the literatures of the Continent in the twelfth century. They are:

a) *Cyfranc Llud a Lleuelys* (The Conversation of Lludd and Llefelys). Lludd (who is a cognate of the figure called Nuadu in Irish tradition) rules Britain from London as an ideal king until three supernatural tribulations (*gormesau*) threaten the welfare of his people. He goes to seek the advice of his wise brother Llefelys (who rules over

France) and learns from him how to put an end to all three plagues. The *gormesau* are trifunctional in character, suggesting an origin as a pre-Christian teaching story; and the name of Lludd's brother, although conventionally rendered as *Llefelys* in modern Welsh, is thought to have actually been *Lleuelys* and contained the element *Lleu*, indicating that the character was originally intended to be a form of the god Lugus, whose trans-functional competence is demonstrated by his role in the story.

b) *Culhwch ac Olwen*. Compelled by a ritual taboo to seek the hand of Olwen, the daughter of the Hawthorn Giant, the hero Culhwch is set a long series of seemingly impossible tasks, culminating in a hunt for the giant boar Trwyth, who was once a human king. He succeeds through the help of numerous companions with supernatural abilities. Although Arthur's court appears in the story, this is not a conventional Arthurian romance: its imagery points rather to a mythology underpinning the rituals associated with Bealtaine/Calan Mai and its Roman equivalent, the Floralia.

c) *Breudwyt Macsen Wledic* (The Dream of the Emperor Maximus). Macsen (Maximus) – based on the historical figure who tried to make himself emperor of the West near the end of the fourth century CE – sees a beautiful woman in a dream and journeys to Britain in the hope of finding her in real life. She turns out to be Elen, a British princess. The "true dream" motif is reminiscent of the Irish tale *Aisling Oengusso*, where Oengus, the son of the Dagda, similarly becomes enamoured of Caer when he encounters her in a dream-vision.

d) *Breudwyt Rhonabwy* (The Dream of Rhonabwy). Rhonabwy, a Welsh soldier in the wars of the later Middle Ages, has a dream in which he witnesses a conflict between Arthur and the hero Owain. This is a very late tale which is in many ways a parody of Arthurian storytelling, but it contains interesting elements that seem to come from earlier native tradition.

**3. The *Tair Rhamant*** (Three Romances)

These three tales in the "Mabinogion" collection are clearly influenced by the French

Arthurian romances of Chrétien de Troyes (who, in the twelfth century, was the first major populariser of Arthurian material outside the Celtic world), although the authors were definitely aware of the native associations of the characters. *Owein* is based on *Yvain*, *Geraint ac Enid* on *Érec et Énide*, and *Peredur* on *Perceval le Gallois*. *Peredur* is the most interesting of these, as it incorporates some elements not found in the French romance and seems to view the story from a different perspective, more consonant with its origins in a Celtic culture. This is the core narrative from which the Grail Quest romances of the later Middle Ages developed: its imagery offers some striking parallels with the Irish *immrama*.

**4. *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*** (The Triads of the Island of Britain).

This twelfth-century compilation (expanded later) was intended to serve as a mnemonic aid for *cyfarwyddiaid* or professional storytellers. Characters and incidents in traditional stories are listed in groups of three, each triad defined by a common characteristic. Ninety-six such triads are included. Although the plots of the tales are alluded to in only the sketchiest fashion, most of these stories are otherwise unknown in written form, making these triads a precious indicator of the real range of the Welsh storytelling tradition in the Middle Ages.

**5. Mythological Allusions in Poetry.**

Some poems in Welsh manuscript collections contain allusions to stories that are otherwise unknown. The cycle of poems attributed to Llywarch Hen, for example, seems to have been designed to fit into a connected narrative in which the speaker, now elderly and alone, lost every one of his many sons to death in battle. This would thus have been a second-function saga told from an ironic or fatalistic perspective. Another group of poems is placed in the mouth of Myrddin, a "wild man" gifted with prophetic vision, who addresses a herd of piglets in the forest. The background story is known from the twelfth-century Latin writings of Geoffrey of Monmouth, as well as the Life of St Kentigern: having become insane after witnessing a particularly gory and futile battle, Myrddin (who served as one of the models for the Arthurian figure Merlin) runs away into the wilderness where, separated from the norms of human culture, he gains powers of prophecy. Apparently related to this story is another one alluded to in a poem from the *Llyfr Du* about Yscolan, a figure cursed and exiled because of his desecration of a holy book. This story has survived in Brittany in the form of

the ballad of "Skolvan" or "Yann Skolan", but it is also clearly related to the Irish story *Buile Shuibhne* (The Madness of Suibhne), which is generally acknowledged to be an Irish imitation of the Myrddin story.

The richest and most enigmatic mythological material is to be found in Peniarth MS 2, usually called the "Book of Taliesin". While Taliesin was a historical 7th-century North British poet, some of whose genuine work has been preserved, many of the poems in this collection date from the later Middle Ages and refer to a tradition in which he was a twice-born figure with Otherworldly knowledge. Two of the best-known and strangest of these poems are "Preiddeu Annwn" (the Spoils of the Otherworld), which tells of an expedition by Arthur to gain a magical cauldron; and "Cad Goddeu" (the Battle of the Trees), in which many species of trees are named as warriors on a battlefield. Without a clear context to explain their argument, both poems are tantalizingly obscure.

**6. Syncretic History.**

Like the Irish intellectuals who put together the *Lebor Gabála Érenn* to serve as a new syncretistic account of Irish history, British Celtic literati during the same period worked on a parallel project in order to provide their island with an account of the past compatible with both Biblical and Classical views of history. No early Welsh-language version of this history has survived, but we have Latin versions in Nennius' ninth-century *Historia Regum Britanniae* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *Historia Britanniae*. The Britons are made to be descended from the Trojan exile Brutus, and the kings following him exhibit the traits of mythological kings in a variety of Indo-European traditions. This narrative also includes the earliest version of the story of Arthur. A later Welsh-language synthesis of this material is *Brut y Brenhinoedd* (The Chronicle of the Kings).

**7. *Ystoria Taliesin*.**

Although it was included by Lady Guest in her original edition of *The Mabinogion*, the story of Taliesin does not come from the same body of manuscript sources as the other tales: it is much later, the first full version of it being found in Elis Gruffydd's 16th century "Chronicle of the Six Ages of the World". However, it was evidently known at a much earlier date, since some aspects of it are implicit in the mysterious "Taliesin" poems mentioned above. It tells of how the hag Cerridwen proposed to make a potion that would endow her

ugly son Afagddu with infinite knowledge, but the power of the potion accidentally passed into the dwarf Gwion, who had been set to watch the cauldron. After a shapeshifting contest Gwion was devoured by Cerridwen, and was reborn as her son Taliesin, but was cast adrift by her in a bag. Discovered by the prince Elphin, Taliesin revealed his supernatural knowledge and used it in the service of his new-found patron.

There is an evident parallel here with the *Fiannaíocht* story of how Fionn Mac Cumhaill received his own Otherworldly knowledge (and the name *Gwion* is a cognate of *Fionn*). It may have been a "secret" initiatory story used by the Welsh bards in their proceedings as an occupational guild, which could explain why it was committed to writing only at a very late date, when the power of the bards as an organized institution was waning.

# Section Six Suggested Reading & Work Sheet

Suggested Reading:

The following title is essential core reading at this level:

REES, Alwyn and REES, Brinley. *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales* (1961). [Not only an excellent survey of the mythological aspects of the literary traditions, it also identifies pre-Christian themes and relates them to the larger Indo-European heritage. As a work of scholarship, it has stood the test of time remarkably well.]

Other useful references:

BROMWICH, Rachel, ed. and trans. *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*.

CROSS and SLOVER. *Ancient Irish Tales*.

FORD, Patrick M. *The Mabinogi and Other Mediaeval Welsh Tales*.

FORD, Patrick M. *Ystoria Taliesin* [text of story in Welsh only, but good presentation of literary and mythological context]

GANTZ, Jeffrey. *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*.

GANTZ, Jeffrey. *The Mabinogion*.

JACKSON, Kenneth. *A Celtic Miscellany* [a nice overview of classic Celtic literature, with many extracts from mythological tales].

KINSELLA, Thomas. *The Tain* [good, idiomatic translation]

MacALISTER, R.A.S., trans. and ed. *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (6 vols., Irish Texts Society).

MacCANA, Proinsias. *Celtic Mythology*.

MacKILLOP, James. *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*. [alphabetized quick-reference work; pan-Celtic]

MacNEILL, Eoin, ed. and trans. *Duanaire Finn*. (2 vols., Irish Texts Society).

McCONE, Kim. *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature*. [anti-nativist bias, but provides a necessary corrective to erroneously "pagan" approaches to Irish literature, and gives a good sense of the significance of the literature in its own time and place]

MEYER, Kuno, ed. and trans. *The Voyage of Bran*.

NAGY, Joseph Falaky. *The Wisdom of the Outlaw: The Boyhood Deeds of Finn in Gaelic Narrative Tradition*.

O hOGAIN, Daithi. *Myth, Legend and Romance: An Encyclopedia of the Irish Folk Tradition*. [despite its title, focuses more on literary tradition]

O'RAHILLY, Cecile, ed. and trans. *Tain Bo Cualnge from the Book of Leinster*.

O'RAHILLY, T.F. *Early Irish History and Mythology* [a little antiquated in places, but still worth consulting]

SJOESTEDT, Marie-Louise (trans. by Myles DILLON). *Gods and Heroes of the Celts* [a seminal early work – essential reading]

SKENE, W.F., ed. and trans. *The Four Ancient Books of Wales.* (2 vols.)

## QUESTIONS

1. Identify the following, place them in context and discuss their significance:
    - Erennan
    - Gofannon mab Dôn
    - Gwenwynwyn and Gwanar
    - Nechtan
    - Brian, Iuchar and Iucharba
    - Tailltiu
    - Net
    - Nemglan and Mess Buachalla
    - Aillaan Mac M'odhna
    - Gwyddno Garanhir

- ❖ Fea and Femen
- ❖ Derg Corra
- ❖ Y Du Traheus
- ❖ Fer I
- ❖ Cnú Deireóil
- ❖ Labraid Loingsech
- ❖ Cano Mac Gartnain
- ❖ Morfran Eil Tegid
- ❖ Dubh Lacha
- ❖ Gwenddoleu mab Ceidio
- ❖ Fintan Mac Bóchna

2. In Irish literature Dian Cécht and his family are the physicians of the Tuatha De Danann. What elements in their story can you relate to the general mythology of healing in Indo-European tradition?
3. 
   i] Point out common elements in *Peredur* and *Immram Maile Dúin*.
   ii] What do you think these elements mean?
   iii] What is it that links these two stories together?
4. 
   i] Discuss the structure of sacred space outlined in *Suidigud Tellaig Temra*.
   ii] Can you see correspondences with the layout of ritual space in both the archaeological record and earlier Indo-European tradition?
5. 
   i] Find at least five examples in Celtic literature where two men are rivals for the affections of one woman.
   ii] Do any of these stories suggest a "mythological" meaning?
   iii] If so, how would you interpret that meaning (based on internal evidence from the tales themselves and the larger context of Indo-European tradition)?
6. 
   i] Chart out Cú Chulainn's interactions with women (human or supernatural) throughout his career.
   ii] Does a pattern emerge?

iii] Are there ambiguities within this pattern?

iv] What do you think this says about second-function perceptions of the feminine?

7.

i] Analyse the trifunctional structure of:

a. Arianrhod's curse on Lleu;

b. the gormesau in Cyfranc Lludd a Llefelys;

c. the three primary episodes of Cú Chulainn's "boyhood deeds";

d. the three primary guises in which the Dagda appears.

i] Compare the similarities and differences between all these narratives.

ii] What overarching concepts appear?

iii] Can you extend them to a few other episodes in Celtic literature?

8.

i] Find seven accounts (try using both Irish and Welsh examples) in which a female figure confers sovereign authority (or whose presence is necessary to the proper exercise of that authority) on a ruler or a group.

ii] What is the basic pattern involved?

iii] What are some of the recurring images?

iv] Can you see a native theological model at the root of these stories?

9. Find nine Celtic literary figures which bear a strong resemblance to attested pre-Christian Celtic deities.

i] Back up your identifications with detailed evidence.

ii] In each case, why do you think the deity was chosen to play that particular role in a given story?

iii] How much of the deity's original [Indo-European/pre-Christian Celtic] theological character and function has been retained?

iv] What has been changed?

10.

i] Describe the characteristics of the *síd* and its inhabitants in Irish literature.

ii] How does this compare to evidence from folklore – especially its ritual implications?

iii] What do you think is the origin of this tradition, in light of a wider body of

evidence from the Indo-European world? Can you point to comparable material in Welsh literature?